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# **WHY FREEDOM MATTERS**

by  
**NORMAN ANGELL**



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We fight for the survival of political and intellectual freedom. Yet we have so little feeling for that freedom, or real understanding of what is involved, that it has been very fashionable in recent years to deride and belittle it. That disparagement shows that this generation does not grasp the significance of the thing for which we fight. The purpose of this book is to recall what political and intellectual freedom means, and how vital it is for the survival of any humane civilisation.

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The disparagement of those things for which we fight is to be found in very high places in Britain. These arguments of profound defeatism—often an apology for the Hitlerian philosophy—should be faced and answered, and not allowed to go by default, for if they are right, and our people and the neutral world pessimistically accept them, we shall lose this war, and Germany will win.

The old nationalist ideas and their maintenance by passionate "thinking with your blood" are favourable to the enemy, but fatal to us. For we can only counter German preponderance by the co-operation of many different nations, by the development of internationalist ideas. Our public opinion can only achieve this development by retaining those habits of rational discussion which the suppression of freedom of opinion destroys. The meaning of political and intellectual freedom is thus not irrelevant to the actual waging of the war; we must understand our cause if our morale is to be equal to the enemy's. Unless we understand it ourselves, we cannot persuade other nations that our cause is theirs; and unless we can do that Germany in the end will win.

There has been a tendency among advocates of the class war to disparage political and intellectual freedom as mere bourgeois ideology, and as, in a sense, a weapon used by the Capitalists to deny the more vital economic freedom. This is a false antithesis. Political and intellectual freedom is not the enemy of economic freedom, but the instrument by which the latter can be attained. No Socialist order which had removed from the ruling class of bureaucrats or dictators the corrective of informed criticism, and removed from the mass the habit and disciplines of tolerant discussion, could possibly work effectively. The judgment which can only come from free discussion would be more necessary in a highly Socialist state than in a Capitalist or individualist one.

## PART II

### MILL'S CASE FOR LIBERTY

'Because so many of this generation have forgotten and tend to distort the grounds upon which the 18th and 19th century protagonists of liberty defended

it, it is useful to recall what those grounds were. They were not, as modern critics suggest, a naive belief in the natural rationality of men. Rather was their case based on the contrary assumption that men were naturally, and by the impulses of their nature, unreasonable and irrational. The necessary rationality has to be deliberately cultivated. Intellectual freedom is indispensable for that cultivation, for the creation of the type of mind necessary for a free, tolerant, humane society.

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The kind of world we live in depends upon the kind of ideas we develop, the quality of our minds. The case for intellectual liberty is that without freedom of thought and discussion the quality of the human mind is bound to be bad. The problem of public folly cannot be solved by dictatorship, for the quality of dictatorship itself will depend upon the mass mind. Dictators do not create themselves. They are created by the mass over whom they rule, and from whom they derive their power.

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If the price of freedom is eternal vigilance, it is vigilance over our own impulses, for the history of the last twenty years reveals that the most dangerous enemy of democracy is demagoguery. We have had government by pander. We may best preserve democracy by realising that the voice of the people is quite often the voice of Satan. To question that voice within ourselves, to refuse "to think with our blood", to realise the moral obligation to use intelligence; to realise that the quality of our society is determined by the quality of our minds, that the preservation of the particular skills which will enable those minds to be efficient social instruments—this is the fundamental condition of progress.



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The industrialised and trustified press as we know it in modern conditions represents not the bulwark of freedom, but more commonly a danger to it. The reasons for this. The remedy is not, however, in public control of the kind which is suitable for the control of material things, railways, cōwers, etc. For the press should be entirely free to criticise the controllers who would control its criticisms. But if to exchange a trustified Press for a government one is to jump out of the frying pan into the fire what is the remedy? Some suggestions.

# WHY FREEDOM MATTERS

## AN INTRODUCTION FOR WAR-TIME

WE are engaged in a life-and-death struggle for the preservation of freedom. In order to succeed in that struggle we must, while it lasts, give up many of our freedoms, even vital freedoms; become, where necessary, as totalitarian as our enemy; live under what is in effect martial law. We are all soldiers now, and soldiers are people who contract out of their normal civil rights and accept the fact that their job is not to question the merits of their orders, but to obey; to be no longer free. Such may well be the price of victory; and of secure freedom.

In these circumstances, does it serve any purpose in war-time to discuss the nature of freedom at all, even though that is the very end and purpose of our fight; the end for which we are prepared to sacrifice our lives? Very many argue, plausibly enough: First, we must concentrate simply and purely on victory, which is a military problem. Then we will consider how to use victory to restore the freedoms we shall have sacrificed meantime.

If I felt that that argument as it stands were valid, this book would not have been written and published just now. But I suggest that that line of thought involves a confusion which jeopardises victory itself; that a widespread understanding of why freedom matters is indispensable to our war morale in a most vital sense: indispensable to our victory.

It is the literal truth to say that the enemy's greatest triumphs, even his military triumphs, so far have been due to the way in which he has been able to utilise a declining faith in freedom on the part of those whom he would subdue.

His technique has by this time become very familiar to us, applied as it has been to the subjugation of a whole long row of lesser states. Availing himself, as his political instruments, of those Fascist, or quasi-Fascist, or Nazi groups which, with the fashionable disparagement of libertarian ideas, have emerged in every country of late, he has been able to paralyse in large measure the effective will to resistance on the part of his prospective victims. Hitler has shown us that even a small group, hoping to profit by discord and confusion, can be so used, especially at moments of crisis, as to cripple any prompt action of resistance by the mass to force and terror. We have indeed seen the indecisions of one man—the Belgian King—involve vast military consequences: in the Belgian case the removal from the path of German aggression of an army of half a million men. Hardly less amazing, though on a scale so much less important, were the results of Hitler's "political preparation" in Norway and Holland.

The point, however, which concerns us is that these small groups would have been completely impotent thus to help in destroying the freedom of the mass if that mass had not itself previously become indifferent to freedom; or confused about the necessary price to pay for it (as, e.g., co-operation with other states for its mutual defence). The relative ease with which Fascist and Nazi have managed to impose their power has been due at bottom to the fact that they had an ideal of sorts and a clear objective, whereas freedom has ceased to be an ideal for the larger mass of common folk whom the Totalitarian set out to dominate. Freedom and democracy had come to be disparaged alike on the Right and on the Left; about equally by the Marxist and the Militarist. The one political purpose about which Socialist and Capitalist, Proletarian and Bourgeois should have been agreed (and about which they suddenly became agreed when the danger finally became too plain to be disregarded even by the purblind) was for years the ideal which high-brows, alike on the Right and Left, had so often derided and disparaged, and about which the low-brows were

indifferent because they had never firmly grasped its meaning and its import. But for the "modern" doubt and disparagement of freedom, the Nazi party could neither have made itself supreme in Germany, and then, having done that, gone on to make Germany for the time being supreme in Europe. Hitler has been able to destroy the freedom first of the German people, and then of neighbouring states because so very, very many did not know what they were surrendering; had such little feeling for its supreme value that again and again—not alone in Germany—the mass yielded to, or acquiesced in policies that led to its surrender.

Hitler knows, supreme demagogue that he is, that where the mass is indifferent about freedom, or is so deeply divided on other things that it cannot combine for any single purpose, a small minority of active and ruthless men can take freedom from the multitude almost without a struggle; as a single nation like Germany can destroy the freedom of a far greater and potentially more powerful—but disunited—non-German Europe.

To put it briefly, liberty has once more become endangered because we have not put first things first. Even where we did not challenge the principle of liberty we did not put it very high in the scale of political values. Again and again we have seen men and parties, not alone in Germany, put other things—the fortunes of a particular political party, or the vindication of some economic doctrine, socialist or anti-socialist, capitalist or anti-capitalist or the indulgence of some class or racial or nationalist hate, of violent partisanship like those which have marked our relations to the Spanish and Russian problems—a long way in front of intellectual and political freedom. And because we have not always put first things first, opportunity has been given to the enemies of freedom to divide its friends, to undermine its cause, to persuade some to betray it. In a sense, perhaps, we can all say that we "believe in freedom"; want it, as we want other good things in life. But the phrase is meaningless if at the same time we want things incompatible with freedom or its defence, and refuse to give those things up; or if we fail to see, or refuse to see,

that certain things which we want, preferences we retain, make secure freedom impossible.

Germany has taken advantage of the failure of men to realise that truth. Hitler has seen, what we have seen less clearly, that victory over your enemies is a political as well as a military problem; that, for instance, the political ideas which in Norway, or Denmark, or Sweden, or Holland, or Belgium caused the governments of those countries to choose "neutrality" instead of co-operation with others for common defence, served admirably the German cause. He has triumphed so far by the defective political judgment of his enemies; triumphed amazingly, on the field of battle itself, as, again, when the political ideas of the Belgian King led to the surrender of an army of half a million men, adding a stupendous military burden to the Allies. Clearly bad political judgment may lead to disastrous military results. War is a political as well as a military problem.

Now the particular freedom with which this book is mainly concerned (and the first which Germany victory would destroy), is the freedom of thought and discussion. The basis of the case here presented is that that particular freedom is indispensable for the development and preservation of sound political judgment. And bad political judgment on the part of governments and cabinets may make the soldier's success impossible.

Concerning which an obvious caveat will be entered.

Judged from the point of view of military success, German policy, particularly in the international sphere, has been immeasurably more astute and successful than our own. And, it will be added, ever since Hitler's arrival in power there has been no freedom of discussion in Germany at all.

That of course is an illusion. Within the narrow circle of the German governing group of the army and the bureaucracy there has been complete freedom of discussion. We know this, not only from the accounts which Hitler's intimates like Rauschning have given of the kind of discussion which goes on among Hitler's associates, but we know it from the very fact that military and political doctrines long accepted by the great authori-

ties, military doctrines which had become "classical", have been radically challenged by groups within the governing orders of Germany and in certain cases completely repudiated; just as the most characteristic of Nazi doctrines have been thrown over from one day to another. This means that in the formulation of policy by the inner circle there must have been complete freedom to challenge old ideas; free discussion. While that freedom has been denied to the mass, it has been maintained and enlarged at the governing centre.

The situation is illustrated most forcibly and dramatically by the story of the relations of Hitler with Russia. For years the propaganda machine of Germany fed and inflamed passionate hatred of Russia and of Communism. These were not alone the mortal enemies of the German fatherland, Germans were told, but of all civilisation. On this point Hitler seemed to display a mystical fanaticism beyond reason. Yet when Germany's military position demanded a complete reversal both of policy and emotion, the reversal was made instantaneously from one day to another. A cold rationalism overrode all emotion where German domination demanded it; and Hitler was able to impose the dictates of that rationalism upon his people and to change the direction of the emotions he had fostered in them.

And, it may be argued, this is a condition for success at least in war; cold rationalism using knowledge of all the facts at the top; blind obedience on the part of the mass who have neither time nor opportunity to know the facts or appreciate the conclusions to be drawn from them.

Now, that, as a war-time policy, is, within certain clear limits, not only valid; it is the policy we are adopting. We can do so safely and usefully on one condition: that we keep alive our sense of the value of that freedom which for war purposes, and for war purposes alone, we have surrendered. If we get the feeling that such things as parliamentary institutions and a free Press have gone for ever, and that they are no great loss, very many will, as the next stage, begin to ask themselves what we are fighting about. And if we don't ask those

questions of ourselves, the enemy propaganda will see to it that they are asked with insistency. That propaganda will not fail to point out that our very slogans about "freedom" run counter to our real beliefs. This is not a very sound basis for morale, as these pages try to show.

But there is another consideration equally vital in that connection.

Germany is able to apply this principle of cold realism at the governing top and blind obedience of the mass to any new ideology which the State may dictate, because that kind of acquiescence is deeply rooted in long-established, ancient German habit.

But that docile acquiescence is not our habit; not the habit either of the English, the Scotch, the Irish, the Americans, or the peoples of the Dominions. Nothing is less realistic in politics than to take a plan, copied from peoples of one habit of thought, and assume that it will work in entirely different conditions. When the framers of the constitutions of certain Spanish American republics copied almost letter for letter the constitutions of the United States or Great Britain, they doubtless expected British or American results of political order and stability as the outcome of applying such a plan of government. They did not get those results.

We now want to achieve political results as useful to our cause as certain political results achieved by the enemy have been to his. But we cannot do it in quite the same way.

Shortly after the Munich negotiations there was more than one proposal coming from our political Right for the Government to extend its control over the Press and to limit the freedom of criticism of the Government. Particularly was it urged that penalties should be imposed for creating public anxiety by the publication of news tending to create belief in the early breaking of European peace. (It will be recalled that one Cabinet Minister described as "jitterbugs" those who professed to see the likelihood of war.) Does the reader suppose that if at that time (just after Munich) the British Government had been endowed with German powers of Press control,

it would have made for the efficiency of the preparation to meet the onslaught which was shortly to confront us—in complete contradiction with all the assurances which the government of that day was then giving? When war actually came, the same admirers of the German method demanded suppression, not merely of Press, but of parliamentary criticism; dictatorship powers for Mr. Chamberlain, and “a truce to all Parliamentary discussion”. Had this course been adopted it would have made impossible that transfer of premiership from Mr. Chamberlain to Mr. Churchill which took place (as the result of parliamentary action) some eight months later. Is it really suggested now that it would have been wise to suspend entirely the parliamentary method on the outbreak of war and thus prevent change in the premiership?

The truth is, of course, that with our deep-rooted habit of widespread political discussion—a habit which cannot be dropped in a month or a year because its indulgence is largely unconscious; we just don't know when we are talking politics—dictatorship here could never secure the docile acceptance of sudden changes of faith and doctrine which a German Government can obtain of its people. As the British Government must carry its people with it in its policy, it can only do so by a process which must be one largely of persuasion. Sound political judgment in the mass is more necessary, even for what at first sight seem purely military purposes, for the smooth working of government in Britain, than it happens to be for the smooth working of government in Germany.

On the passage of the Emergency Powers Act of May, 1940, a military man of the older type remarked that there was now no place for civilian opinion; that only the soldier could command; that the civilian's job was to keep his mouth shut, and do as he was told by the military authority.

It is not quite as simple as that. It is not even true as a statement of the constitutional position: Parliament is still in being; having passed one Act to create certain powers, it can pass another to amend them. But, more than that, the military function cannot, in the nature of



things, either dominate the civilian's function, or even absorb it. The two spheres are interdependent, and it is vital just now to recognise it. The soldier's task is itself largely a civilian one. War is now a matter of machines more than it has ever been in history, and the making of those machines is a civilian's job; the conditions under which they can best be made must be determined by civilians; the armies have to be fed and clothed and transported, and those functions are almost entirely civilian functions; the direction of the great industrial machine without which the armies are impotent depends upon policies which civilians are better able than soldiers to determine. And when the vast devastations and destructions of invasion or bombardment produce chaos, it will be upon the civilian that will be thrown the task of restoring some sort of order to enable the resistance to continue.

But the civilian's job goes beyond this. When, in May, sweeping changes were made in the French high command, it was a civilian, a politician, who had to take the responsibility of making them: the civilian sat in judgment upon the work of the soldier. And the conditions which enabled M. Reynaud to do this were, in their turn, the work of other politicians, just as the changes which saw the end of Mr. Chamberlain's Government and the substitution for it of a type of Government Britain has never before known, were the outcome of civilian decisions, civilian opinion; the final outcome of the opinions of millions of ordinary men. From first to last it was civilian opinion which was shaping destiny. So the quality of the civilian mind has a certain importance.

All this is very elementary; self-evident, indeed. But it is necessary to say it because there is a disposition now to take the line that just as party politics have been suspended, so also should we suspend all civilian criticism of policy; that the civilian should put his critical faculties in cold storage for the duration.

Yet, as we have just seen, civilian opinion will in the end determine what the soldier does, what he is able to do; to what degree we hold out, or are able to hold out.

Civilian opinion, and the policy resulting from it, may easily make the success of the soldier's task impossible.

None more than the present rulers of Germany know the vital and supreme importance of civilian public opinion. That is why Germany has created the most elaborate and the most costly machinery for the control and direction of public opinion which the world has ever known. Why should the German Government lavish such vast resources upon directing and shaping the opinion of the common man if that opinion has no military importance?

It is clear indeed that in certain very vital respects Germany has grasped more clearly and vividly than we have done the importance of the non-military contribution to military success; the importance, for instance, of the political factor; of political preparation for military action. Hitler might indulge his hatred of Communism with a fire-eating eloquence as violent as that indulged by a Captain Ramsay or a Henry Page Croft, on our side. But when the military success of Germany demanded an end to these prejudices, they were ended. For Hitler knew that if his tanks and 'planes were to be used successfully, he must first of all change the political situation in Europe by altering Russia's relationship to the Western Powers. That was not the soldier's job, but the politician's. Unless the political task were successfully accomplished, the soldier's task would fail. Yet the proposition that political strategy had an equal importance with material equipment for military success was a proposition for years either flatly denied or disregarded by many in Britain who wielded power.

If the civilian maker of machines is a vital part of the apparatus of war, the civilian producer of food indispensable to the work of the soldier, the civilian railway manager as indispensable to victory as the general in the field, the civilian chemist indispensable for the production of the ammunition which the soldier uses, the student of psychology is as indispensable as any. There can be no efficient strategy without deep study of Hitler's mind, of the psychological forces which his regime has de-

veloped; of the way those forces are likely to operate; of the motives which mainly will determine the behaviour of the German people and the German soldier. These may not be part of military science; but they are certainly part of military success. And it is largely here that we have failed. "The enemy do not behave as the French High Command supposed that he would behave," said M. Reynaud to the Senate. We had misread the enemy's mind; we ourselves had clung too closely to classical conceptions in military science; had in effect been the victims of military conservatism. The French military spokesman put it bluntly and courageously: "Our main failure has been an intellectual failure." Or, as M. Reynaud himself put it: "Of all the tasks which concern us, the most important is clear thinking."

It is indeed a tragic reflection that the epic heroism of so many thousands of the children of France—and Britain—should have been rendered of no avail because our military and political thought had not equalled the heroism of our soldiers. One rebels at such a reflection. Sacrifice and courage of that sublime quality ought of themselves, we feel, to suffice. But we civilians have a task beyond that merely of admiring the soldier's heroism. It is for us to see that we do not by bad policies and inadequate thought make the soldier's heroism futile.



Let us summarise: We have seen the enemy violate all precedents political and military, disregard ancient military doctrine, and, above all, recognise the military value of non-military political manœuvring. *He* has not been the victim of military or political conservatism; his changes in method and doctrine have been radical. The treasured tenets of Nazidom have not only been discussed with complete open-mindedness, they have been thrown overboard. In other words, there has been in a small circle at the top the completest intellectual freedom, and the enemy's successes could never have been achieved unless there had been. He could confine that intellectual freedom to the small circle that decides policy, because the German nation can be

handled like a flock of sheep or a herd of cattle. We are a different kind of flock or herd. Our political and military conservatives, particularly, are tough and stubborn. We have seen them even in the face of catastrophe cling to old ideas and old prejudices. Their inertia, if not their opposition to discarding "classical conceptions" in military or political strategy, makes difficult the kind of changes which Hitler is able to make (as, e.g., directing all Germans to take to their bosom as friends the Bolsheviki whom but a week previously he has been describing as the scum of the earth and Germany's deadliest enemies). If our Government is to secure the necessary acquiescence from the public for a policy of equal realism and radicalism, then political discussion must be relatively free, to the end that we may face new situations and meet them by "unusual" methods, understandingly and willingly. If we cannot do it more or less in our way we shall not do it at all.

It is doubtful whether our public yet realise how much war is a political and psychological as well as a military problem; and how much more vividly Hitler has recognised that fact than we seem to have done. The earlier victories of Hitler, which enabled him to work into a strategic position of such vast power that he could threaten the world, were not military victories at all: they were not brought about by war, but by political and diplomatic means, by an amazingly shrewd exploitation of psychological factors—a trading upon the prejudices, weaknesses, intellectual confusions and hesitations of others. Conquests for which great kings of the past would have had to wage long wars, Hitler has managed to achieve without—until reaching Poland—the loss of a single German soldier.

But for these bloodless, non-military, political victories, Germany would have been in no position to wage war at all. In the world of 1920 we had a situation in which a Germany of sixty or seventy millions confronted an anti-German world of anything up to a thousand millions. When Hitler came to power he faced the question: "How can I overcome opponents that outnumber me ten to one, or even twenty to one?" He knew the answer. It is

as old as history: Divide your enemy and see that he does not divide you. The implications of that are developed in the pages which follow.

To achieve his purpose of disruption Hitler exploited the old savage impulses of tribalism, the cruder nationalist passions, passions which serve to unite Germany, but to disunite those threatened by her. So he played up anti-alienism, anti-foreignism, anti-semitism.

It is true that he did not invent the dislike of the average sensual man for co-operation with foreigners, but he knew how to exploit it; to undermine and frustrate all efforts by the non-German European States towards a collective resistance to his growing power. And in this effort to discredit collective defence, he had plenty of eminent allies in Great Britain, newspaper and other.

His efforts to divide his enemies had the most brilliant success of all when he tackled the problem of Russia.

Up to within less than two years ago, Russia was still the ally of France and Czechoslovakia. So long as that remained the case, Hitler dared not risk war, that dreaded war on two fronts.

How did he face that danger? Did he depend merely on his arms? If he had done so, and declared war on Russia, he would have been utterly lost. But he did nothing of the kind. He triumphed—as he has triumphed in Austria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium—by using psychological methods in preparing the way for the successful use of his arms. Hitler knew that among the conservative-minded all over Europe—particularly, perhaps, in Britain—there were panic fears of a Bolshevik plot to attack and destroy the Western nations. So he represented himself and Germany as the bulwark of civilisation against Bolshevism. And a great many in Britain and France were quite ready to believe him.

Many of us had not really made up our minds whether Bolshevism or Nazism was the greater danger, and our diplomatic bungling reflected those hesitations. Hitler, who knew all the time that at the appropriate moment he would be ready to enter into an alliance with Russia against the West, was able to find groups of people in

every country who trembled at the pictures which he drew of the Communist; who believed that the Fascist and Nazi dictators would save the world from bloody revolution and red ruin, and who were therefore ready to play his game.

He used such people in Austria, in Czechoslovakia, in Denmark, in Norway, in Sweden, in Belgium, in Holland and even in Britain and France. They were often quite small groups, but he found that even tiny groups were often sufficient at moments of crisis, by creating confusion, to paralyse the action of governments he desired to crush.

And please note that these Quislings were practically never aliens, or refugees, or Jews, or Communists, or Pacifists. They were usually quite eminent personages, natives of the country they consciously or unconsciously betrayed.

It is true that Hitler could not have succeeded without his tanks and aeroplanes. But he could never have got himself into a position to use those things as he has done without this "diplomatic" or psychological preparation. Hitler has won power first for himself and his party in Germany, and then for Germany in Europe, by exploiting certain ideas, ambitions, passions, tempers, for ends that are ignoble, evil and mischievous.

We could have countered that by exploiting counter-vailing ideas, ambitions, passions, tempers, for ends which are noble and generous; by that clear thinking which M. Reynaud urges. Our management of the Russian situation shows how little clear our thinking has sometimes been. Nazism and Bolshevism may both be equally evil; but the event has shown that they are not both equally dangerous. It is not the Russians who have fought their way to the Channel coasts. Nazism indeed may be less evil than Bolshevism; that very fact might make the former the more dangerous.

The evil of Bolshevism is an evil mainly for the Russian people; the evil of Nazism is just as great an evil for Germany's neighbours; for us. Stalin could say with complete truth: "I have no hopes of conquering the British and French empires, and do not want to." Hitler could not with any truth say any such thing. Our foreign

interests (as distinct from internal methods of government) were not necessarily in conflict with Stalin's. Our foreign interests were in complete conflict with Hitler's. Russia has everything to fear from a German domination of Europe, a complete German triumph. So have we. In that vital respect Russia and Western Europe have a common interest. Let us utilise it.

If we are to use the psychological weapon with effectiveness at all equal to that which Hitler has displayed, we must show at least an equal inventiveness, initiative, "unusualness", and particularly perhaps an equal rationalism.

But it is not enough in our case that that should be shown by half-a-dozen persons at the top. They would be baulked far more than Hitler would be baulked by the old habits of thought, the deeply set prejudices of a wide public. If our Government is to be able to act with decision and competence, then much of the public itself must be rational; have the habit of subjecting sheer animal pugnacities and resentments to a calmer "second thought", to a rational realisation of the facts of the situation. In our case at least the prosecution of the war itself, the very decision as to which freedoms must be suppressed, can best be subserved by intellectual freedom; our disciplines best maintained by that open-minded and tolerant discussion for which these pages plead.

## PART I

### THE ENEMY WITHIN AND WITHOUT

#### CHAPTER I

#### WHY THIS BOOK HAS BEEN WRITTEN

We fight for the survival of political and intellectual freedom. Yet we have so little feeling for that freedom, or real understanding of what is involved, that it has been very fashionable in recent years to deride and belittle it. That disparagement shows that this generation does not grasp the significance of the thing for which we fight. The purpose of this book is to recall what political and intellectual freedom means, and how vital it is for the survival of any humane civilisation.

THIS book has been written under the impulse of a deep conviction and a deep anxiety.

The conviction is this: German triumph in the present war would mean the disappearance once again over most of the earth of that principle of thought and conduct by which alone man has succeeded in liberating himself—for very brief intervals only—from the fears and cruelties, terrors and ferocities which have oppressed by far the greater part of his life upon the planet.

The anxiety which has provoked the book arises from the fact that the present generation, ruling orders and people alike, in Britain (as elsewhere) are in large part indifferent to this principle; do not believe it greatly matters; have ignored or belittled and disparaged it; the disparagement being common to the extreme Communist of the Left and the extreme Conservative of the Right; to the highbrow writer on the philosophy



of politics, and to the popular columnist of the daily press. We have lost the political faith of an earlier generation as we have ignored or misinterpreted the intellectual basis of that faith. And though we are all prepared to fight to prevent Germany imposing upon us a form of society which disregards the principle in question, very many of us are quite prepared to impose such a society upon ourselves.

This lack of deep conviction as to the importance of any fundamental moral difference between the Totalitarian view of life and politics and our own, is not only affecting our unity and morale in the war, but the actual political conduct of the war (particularly in relation to the co-operation of neutrals) to such degree that our victory may be indecisive, or placed in jeopardy, and if achieved, no more permanent than our last victory over the Germans proved to be.

The principle of thought and conduct which the Germans actively repudiate, and about which we are for the most part indifferent, is, of course, the principle of intellectual and political liberty; the principle of law or constitutionalism, which in the organisation of society is the practical expression of intellectual freedom. Without law there can in practice be no political liberty, and without intellectual liberty, freedom of discussion, the law can never for long be good law. For the judgment of rulers removed from criticism is bound to be defective, and the judgment of a people denied alike access to the facts, or the right to discuss them, is certain to be worthless. Such a situation is bound to end in violence, alike of thought and of action, or in slavery; the subjugation of whole peoples to an evil rule they dare not question, and which they end by accepting in servile acquiescence. We hear much about war "ending civilisation". If by that is meant that we shall no longer be able to make steam engines or wireless sets, the prophecy is not likely to be fulfilled. Those things are still made competently enough in Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. The danger is that physical science may be applied to the building up of a civilisation of a very servile and cruel type. And a servile civilisation can

last a long time, if history is any guide. The Egyptian civilisation, which built the pyramids, where both priestly and kingly powers were combined in the rulers and the vast majority of the population were condemned to slavery of a very harsh kind, was technically efficient (as the contents of tombs of the kings have proved), stable, and very long lived—a life reckoned in thousands of years. Neither the stability nor the longevity of that civilization were qualities at which the people who endured it had any reason to rejoice.

The quality of man's society is determined by the quality of his mind; and the ultimate case for intellectual freedom is that without it the quality of his mind—his thinking, that is—is certain to be bad; his ideas socially evil. Plainly, if we are to judge by results in the world about us, his prevailing ideas of society are bad, and need changing. If the change is to be for the better, he must use his mind in the right way.

Man's interpretation and judgment, even of the simple facts of the physical world about him, went wildly wrong until, after unnumbered ages, he hit upon the right method of using his mind, saw the virtue of doubt, enquiry, discovered the inductive method of reasoning. Even in finding out how best to grow his food, navigate the seas, or cure and prevent disease he had to learn to tolerate the heretic, to consider patiently conclusions which differed from prevailing ones; to learn, in other words, intellectual liberty, freedom of thought and discussion. But if that liberty is indispensable to the understanding of the facts of the physical world it is much more so when we come to the processes of human society, to law, to rights and duties, the maintenance of equitable relations between men. And so much more difficult to apply.

It is not merely a matter of obtaining certain political or economic results, but the right kind of human beings. (Though the kind of human being which a given type of society produces ought to be considered as the most important "economic result".) The attitude of intellectual liberty, the habit of free discussion, alone can

develop tolerance of criticism—toleration, that is, of those who differ from us. And without that tolerance and toleration there can be neither secure understanding nor kindness; only anger, recrimination, hatreds, bitter sometimes as the hatreds of the religious wars; or the blind and servile acceptance of all that autocratic authority may impose. Events of the last ten or fifteen years in the Totalitarian countries should have taught us, but have not, that with the suppression of intellectual freedom there vanishes not merely such abstractions as democracy and law, but things which are not abstractions at all, which are an indispensable part of any humane civilisation—pity, mercy, compassion. It is by no accident that upon the heels of the suppression of intellectual liberty, whether in Berlin, Rome, or Moscow, there follows immediately, and inevitably, a cold closing of the heart, a dull and dumb acquiescence by millions of ordinary folk in cruelties of which one dare hardly think—cruelties and horrors which in Germany have been perpetuated by men who are heirs to a civilisation, a racial and cultural background, very near to our own; perpetuated by men biologically just like ourselves, and whom yesterday we thought of as kindly and humane. How did a nation that has given us such great things in music, in science, in philosophy, come to this pass?



It is an astonishing thing that we still seem unconscious of the precariousness of the moral values of civilisation; fail to realise how easily they may slip between our fingers; with what difficulty men grant freedom to others; how unnatural, it would seem, is forbearance and humanity.

Man, as we now know him—with body and brain physically that which he possesses to-day—has lived on this planet for some hundreds of thousands of years. During nearly the whole of that time he has been a creature of the jungle and the caves, cowed by fears of the forest and the night, of its demons and its witches, which he has tried to placate with human blood; and the civilisations which he has established have lasted

relatively but a moment; and were themselves marked by slavery, appalling cruelties, human sacrifice in various forms to various kinds of blood-loving gods; by gladiatorial shows, Inquisitions, judicial tortures, suttee, the juggernaut. . . . Humane civilisation has been but "brief gleams" in a long night of dark cruelty and terror. For every generation in which something like a humane civilisation has prevailed, there have been hundreds, perhaps thousands, of generations of cruel savagery or still more cruel "civilisation". And though brief gleams show that man can, if he will, achieve a free and humane society, experience also shows that he seldom wills it; and, having won it, has never so far kept it for very long.

Humane and kindly civilisation is not "natural" to man at all. It is a cultivated and artificial thing, depending upon certain ways of thought, ways which, once adopted, are easily lost unless watched and developed. One such way of the mind's use, and a quite indispensable one, is undoubtedly that inductive method of reasoning just referred to: the scientific spirit, enquiry, a desire to hear the other's point of view, the principle of intellectual liberalism, that is. This principle, or attitude of mind, is itself an expression of tolerance and toleration, when applied to social problems, and is a foundation for kindness, just as intellectual intolerance is the root of psychological attitudes that lead straight into repressions and cruelties. The mere mechanical acceptance, without intellectual comprehension, of codes or creeds enjoining love and mercy, is no assurance against those cruelties, as the mediæval history of Christianity, the very religion of love and mercy, itself proves.

If this principle of intellectual freedom goes—as it will with the triumph of Germany, and as it may with our triumph, unless there is a wider and more penetrating understanding of its nature—then perhaps for very long periods, over most of the earth, humane and kindly life for man will be at an end, and we shall see emerging once more those things to which he is so much more accustomed: the slave state, with actual

chattel slavery, the possession of "inferior" men by "superior"; torture, Inquisitions; the dictator who shall embody both the religious and the political law; Hitlers and Stalins, whose word and whim shall be the law, infallible, not to be questioned; despots to whom men must give obedience and make obeisance as to Divine Beings. Under such rule men may build even bigger and better Pyramids than those of old. But they will not be free; it will be perilous to express their thought; to ask even where they are being led; they will be enslaved alike in body and in mind, will come to worship Moloch as God; and mercy and compassion will be known no more.

## CHAPTER II

### WHICH FREEDOM?

No man and no nation in organised society can be completely free. Complete freedom of each would paradoxically destroy the freedom of all. Civilisation is based upon giving up less valuable for more valuable freedoms. Why the freedom of thought is the supreme freedom of all, and the one freedom which must not be limited if we are to decide wisely which other freedoms we have to surrender.

In this war, as in nearly every war, all the belligerents declare that they fight for "freedom". What do they mean?

In organised society there can be no such thing as complete freedom of action for its members, whether those members be men or nations. If a man were free to let his sewage run into his neighbour's drinking-water, or a motorist free to drive as he likes, no one else's life would be safe; so no one else could be described as "free". The rule is as true for nations as for individual men. A nation "free" to dominate its neighbours, to make life impossible for them by (for instance) shutting them off from access to the outside world; "free" to dictate to them the kind of life they shall lead, to forbid them to make this, that, or the other political or economic experiment; free to decide that any dispute between itself and its neighbours shall be settled by itself only, by the exercise of its sole and unrestricted judgment—a nation thus "free" to impose its will has quite obviously destroyed the freedom of others. In other words, we can only secure the maximum of freedom for all by limiting the freedom of each. Indeed, the individual, even when not concerned with the effect of his conduct upon others, but only with its effect upon himself, must, in order to save the

more valuable freedoms of his life, give up the less valuable; must surrender the freedom to lie in bed all the morning in order to secure the freedoms which go with the retention of a good income, or a good job: freedom from debt, freedom to send the wife and youngsters to the sea-side in summer time; as he may have to surrender the freedom to refuse service in the British army in order not to have to serve in a Nazi one.

But which freedoms, when we come to problems of government and society, are the freedoms to preserve, and which the freedoms we can safely surrender?

It is not the purpose of this book to attempt to cover the whole area of that wide problem, nor answer all the very detailed questions such discussion would necessitate. It is the book's purpose to point out that in order to answer truly any of the questions involved, there is one supreme freedom which must be preserved. It is a freedom which can be accorded to all without injury to any; which is, indeed, indispensable to the welfare of all, and which, once destroyed, makes true answers, except by accident, impossible, and places all other freedoms, as all other goods, moral or material, in mortal jeopardy.

Yet it is precisely this freedom that men surrender most easily, and which, indeed, they have so often, and so long, taken pleasure in destroying, as though the destruction satisfied some savage lust. And at this moment, this particular freedom, having, after age-long pain and struggle, emerged into life, is once more being attacked and slain over large areas of the earth; and is threatened on many sides in Britain itself.

This fundamental and supreme freedom, upon which in the long run all others depend, is "the freedom to know", freedom of thought, of opinion, of discussion; free access to the raw materials of thought and discussion, to knowledge, particularly to knowledge of the facts relative to policies pursued by governments; freedom to know what our rulers are doing with our lives; freedom to discuss the facts in speech and print; the freedom described by Milton as "the liberty to know,

to utter and to argue freely, according to conscience, which is above all liberties”.

In all ages men—not merely tyrants, but the common man who in the end suffers most by its disappearance—have desired to destroy this one freedom which each might possess without injury to others or to the whole. Kings and princes and priests; potentates and parliaments, bureaucracies, governments, dictators, churches, have reserved their most ferocious punishments, the most revolting tortures of the Inquisition, the worst terrors of the Concentration Camp or Arctic exile for the suppression of this basic liberty of opinion and discussion; of the process by which alone real thought and secure knowledge become possible. It would seem that no crime, in the view of those who have power over their fellows, is equal in infamy to the crime of independent thought, of religious or political or economic heresy. And in its suppressions of heresy, authority has usually had strong popular approval.

Some of us had supposed that the Right to Know had been finally and definitely secured in Western society for all time, particularly after the victories of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. But in two short decades since the last war the principles which animated the intellectual revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have been challenged by counter revolutions; counter revolutions supported about equally by the political Right and the political Left; by Fascist, Nazi, and Communist alike; in Moscow as much as in Berlin or in Rome; by mobs of schooled youngsters from the Universities (a large element in Hitler's early following), clamouring that the right to know where their leader is leading them shall be taken from them to the end that they may go blindfold; as well as by embittered workers from the mines and factories, preaching the dictatorship of the Proletariat, the forcible repression of “*bourgeois* ideology”. While popular newspapers, exploiting emotionalism, herd instinct, and hysteria, make the vital political reforms (which are those in the international field) impossible by reason of inflamed pre-



judice, University, dons in learned tomes disparage the reason which might correct the popular irrationalism; disparage that reason, whether expressed in the rationalism of the eighteenth, or the liberalism of the nineteenth century.

It is not merely that in Communist Russia or Nazi Germany, the Right to Know is suppressed with equal ferocity by Political Inquisitions imposing a terror no less appalling than that of the religious Inquisitions of old, but that in Fascist Italy, in Imperial Japan, in Franco Spain, in most of the Balkans, in much of South America, the mind of man is no longer free, and "dangerous thoughts" are made the gravest of political offences.

Think for a moment what this counter revolution means, coming, as it does, on the morrow of a war waged to make the world safe for democracy—that is for political and intellectual freedom.

Millions of our youngsters, a great part of the youth of Britain, France, America, Belgium, Serbia, Italy, risked their lives, or gave them, or lamed them, in order to make secure this thing of political freedom. Parents saw their children march into a cauldron of torment in order to achieve that end. It was our slogan. And then when the killing was all over and the shambles cleaned up a little, vast multitudes of the people who had thus suffered, the people who had given their children, discovered that after all they did not want the democracy or freedom for which their sons or fathers had died; that it was a mistake, an illusion. They became bored with democracy, with its everlasting talk, and lawyers' wrangles, and party manœuvring, and corruption, and time-wasting elections, and personal intrigues of politicians. Far better leave it to leaders and get "action"—decisive, downright; "get something done".



Certain questions arise at this point: First, if so complete a change of opinion about the thing for which we fought, so strange a reaction, was a result of the last war, what may we expect as the result of the present

war? And second, if we regret that result, that reaction, as presumably we do, since now, despite the widespread disparagement of the things for which we fought in the last war, we are now fighting for them all over again, how did the change of mind come about? Why do the things for which we are prepared to die to-day become in a year or two things to which we do not attach the least value? And, finally, in view of these futilities, how may we prevent their repetition?

That sudden revulsion of feeling about freedom and democracy at least proves this: Those masses of men, ready at one moment to die at the sound of the words "freedom", "democracy", and who at the next moment find they do not want freedom (and this has not happened only in the countries that have gone Fascist in lesser or greater degree), did not really know what they wanted because they did not know why they wanted it, why it was valuable. Their slogan about democracy and freedom had doubtless a certain emotional connotation and stimulus, but obviously it had no basis in real understanding; there was no sense of *why* it had such supreme value; *why* it was worth dying for. And without that intellectual comprehension mere emotional excitement at the sight or sound of a given word—"liberty", "fraternity", "peace", "democracy", "justice"—becomes a trap, the means by which men are led to surrender their most precious goods, betray their most sacred causes.

In many respects the danger of failure and futility is greater on this occasion than on the last. It is the paradox of a war for freedom against aggression that it can only be fought if the very things for which we fight are temporarily suppressed; and unless we are very conscious of what we are doing, and why, the temporary may easily become the permanent. That danger is greater in this than in the last war because war was less totalitarian then than it is now; the need for the suspensions of our freedoms was less.

We know that in a state of war or siege the normal civil freedoms of a democratic state have to be suspended; more and more does government necessarily

tend to military dictatorship. That is inevitable, and we and the French accept it, hoping that at the end of the war we shall be able to re-establish the old freedoms. But the difference between peace and war wears thinner every year. For six months after September 1939 we said commonly that the war had not really commenced yet. Nevertheless France found it necessary to imprison fifty deputies, to establish a burdensome censorship, and we, in Britain, made preparations for being governed by the regional fuhrers who had already been appointed. And if that condition could not be described as "war", the years which preceded it could hardly be described as "peace". Unless we can end both war and that kind of peace, freedom is at an end, surrendered by consent; and we too, without having been beaten by Germany, will have adopted much of Germany's kind of government and way of life.

Here we see the relation between freedom and internationalism, between the personal freedom of citizens within each state, and the creation of co-operation between those states to resist aggression—that is to say for the creation of some sort of international society. If we are to live normally in a state of siege our freedom vanishes; and we must so live unless the free nations can present a united front to the aggressor, can act collectively for defence; form, that is, a society. We cannot create that society without a degree of freedom of discussion which will enable us to modify the deeply set impulses of nationalism. It is clear that unless we can rise to a sufficient measure of political rationalism in Western Europe to counteract and discipline the more primitive impulses of nationalist emotionalism, we shall not be able to bring about sufficient co-operation between the free democracies to enable them to combine and meet Totalitarian power; to end the international anarchy, the fears and uncertainties of that anarchy, the hectic competitive armament one against the other, with the ally of yesterday the enemy of to-day, and the enemy of to-day the ally of to-morrow.

That irrational temper of disruptive nationalism aids

Germany and is disastrous to us. Yet with us also rationality in politics is increasingly disparaged.

At the time of the last war the whole case for intellectual and political freedom had not been challenged as it has been since, alike in political action and political philosophy. When we entered the last war the schools of thought which have since engaged in what they regard as the debunking of the case for intellectual and political freedom, and of the hopes centred round that ideal were less fashionable. In the years since the war alike in Britain, France, and America there has grown up a whole literature expressive of pessimism, defeatism, moral nihilism. The intellectual liberties for which Voltaire in France, and Locke and Mill in Britain fought so insistently as the very foundations of the good life, the guarantee of the moral values of a free society, have been systematically belittled by certain modern writers who have laboriously used reason to prove that reason cannot be trusted; and have maintained campaigns against liberty and liberalism, campaigns which would not have been possible but for the liberty and liberalism they would destroy.

Incidentally, it is this "revolt against reason" which the Nazi has found so attractive, and which is so characteristic of his doctrine, the doctrine which demands that henceforth we shall "think with our blood", leaving intellect to the decadent and the Jew, whom the Nordic hero is to eliminate.

Into the service of this doctrine of the unimportance of intelligence, thought, reason, have been pressed new readings of the old Calvinistic Predestination. Economic determinism has become, in the hands of certain neo-Marxists, justification for regarding war as "inevitable". Only this time it is the class war. Such doctrines serve to attune men's minds to cruelties, ferocities, horrors, as something imposed by fate and nature, something for which man has no moral responsibility, which he cannot prevent. The doctrine of pre-ordained fate has hardened in much modern writing into an almost oriental fatalism, the sense that man cannot use his intelligence and the power of his mind to make his

world decent and tolerable; cannot do appreciably better than he has done, cannot bring about, without recurrent killings, ferocities, hatreds, cruelties, and abominations, the changes which every living society must face. The possibility of peaceful change seems to be rejected as naïve Utopianism by the "realists" who insist that man is the helpless puppet of forces beyond his control.

Quite a number of those who are at this moment actually in charge of the task of informing the public mind about the purposes of the war have expressed publicly, in the recent past, their conviction that the ideals for which we are supposed to be fighting are unrealisable ideals, shams and pretences. This hardly seems a happy augury for making our next victory less barren of the things it aims at than the last proved to be. And while the case against freedom has received such abundant and varied expression, the case for intellectual freedom as established in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been so neglected, often distorted, sometimes turned upside down, that to-day even educated people have forgotten what the case is. For that reason mainly—to recall the nature of that case—this book has been written.

### CHAPTER III

## HITLER'S INTELLECTUAL ALLIES IN BRITAIN

The disparagement of those things for which we fight is to be found in very high places in Britain. These arguments of profound defeatism—often an apology for the Hitlerian philosophy—should be faced and answered, and not allowed to go by default, for if they are right, and our people, and the neutral world pessimistically accept them, we shall lose this war, and Germany will win.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN (then Prime Minister) has told us in a much-quoted passage that the purpose at which we aimed in entering the war was to “enable the peoples of Europe to preserve their independence and liberties” as the indispensable condition of preserving our own.

Even before the war, in explanation of the guarantee to Poland, he had pointed out this interdependence between the preservation of the freedom of others and the preservation of our own. In his statement to Parliament of April 3rd of last year (1939) he said:

What we are concerned to do is to preserve our independence, and when I say our independence I do not mean only that of this country. I mean the independence of all states which may be threatened by the pursuit of such a policy as I have described. Therefore we welcome the co-operation of any country, whatever may be its internal system of government, not in aggression, but in resistance to aggression.

A little later (June 29th) the Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, was even more definite in enunciating this same principle. He said:

We know that if the security and independence of other nations are to disappear, our own security and our own independence will be gravely threatened. We know that if international law and order is to be preserved, we must be prepared to fight in its defence.

In another passage the Foreign Secretary is even more explicit:

We have tried to make it clear by word and deed that we are prepared to assist those countries which feel their independence immediately threatened and are ready to defend their freedom. . . . That is why we gave our undertaking to Poland. . . . In failing to uphold the liberties of others we run great risks of betraying the principle of liberty itself and with it our freedom and independence.

The very fact that the act of aggression which caused us to take up arms was not against ourselves, but against a state on the other side of Europe, was itself dramatic illustration of the truth that nations (like individuals) must co-operate if they are to achieve security against violence and oppression. Since the outbreak of war Government spokesmen have been insisting that if we will not defend others—that is to say, the principle of freedom from violence, or the law against violence when others are the victims—then it becomes ultimately impossible to defend ourselves. That is, of course, the basic principle of organised society. Without it no society could exist: the society which will not defend its members from lawless violence is, from the point of view of its members, not worth defending, and they will refuse the sacrifices necessary to maintain it. The truth as applied to international relationships has been tragically illustrated the last few years. A powerful aggressor, or aggressor combination, has confronted a number of lesser states. If the strength of the latter were combined it would be greater than that of the aggressor and make them impregnable. But if each of the lesser will only defend himself individually, arguing that defence of others is no affair of his, refusing aid to the victim of aggression, then it is quite clear that all the lesser states can be destroyed in detail, picked off one by one. If in such circumstances, defence is not collective, there can be no defence at all.

It is for this principle, embodying surely a general interest—that of self-preservation against violence, destruction, death—that Britain now fights. It is a general, indeed a universal interest, in the sense that the

law against murder embodies a universal interest. Some, it is true, may desire for various purposes to commit murder, but none, presumably, desires to be murdered. It is largely by virtue of this principle that law becomes more powerful than those who assail it. But the governments of the Allies have done more than merely indicate a general principle. They have forecast the methods by which the principle is to be made after victory a political reality, so that the tragedy of 1918—a costly victory so undone in the course of two decades that it has to be fought all over again—shall not be repeated. On October 12th last the Prime Minister said :

We are not only aiming at victory but rather looking beyond it to the laying of the foundations of a better international system which will mean that war is not to be the inevitable lot of every succeeding generation. . . . The peace which we are determined to secure must be a real peace, not an uneasy truce interrupted by constant alarms and repeated threats.

And a few weeks later M. Daladier, as well as Mr. Chamberlain, indicated the process by which they hoped to see a new international order develop. The intimate co-operation of war-time between France and Britain would be prolonged into the peace for peace purposes, developing into what would amount to an Anglo-French Federation, a Federation open to all who shared its peaceful aims, becoming thus the nucleus of an ever-widening European organisation.

So far so good. We have outlined for us here a purpose, an aim, a cause, as great as that for which nations ever fought, or men ever died, since the purpose is to make possible the elimination of unmeasured cruelty and misery from the life of mankind.

But here we encounter that strange and disturbing paradox of British politics referred to in a previous chapter ; a fact to which we tend to close our eyes because *it is an uncomfortable fact, mention of which is deemed " tactless " .*

A convention has grown up to disregard it, to say nothing about it, to set aside discussion of it and " get on with the war " . A very influential school of political thought which has grown up during the last few years in



Britain, a school of thought which is, perhaps, the most influential in the long run in the shaping of policy, takes the view that any such "principle" as that enunciated by Lord Halifax and for which we are presumed to be fighting is an illusion, a fallacy; that there is no such principle; that it cannot express the general interest of mankind because (this particular school believes) there is no such general interest capable of embodiment in an international order; that such an order, whatever its form, is a chimera; that collective action against aggression as such, whatever its type of organisation, is a completely unworkable idea; misleading, mischievous. This political philosophy (not in its basis new, because it seems to draw deeply upon Machiavelli and Marx) is a great deal more than mere scepticism concerning the League or Collective Security, or the possibility of a peaceful Europe. Scepticism implies doubt: "We don't know." But this particular school of thought takes the view that it does know; that it knows all such plans and projects to be based upon fallacy or sham or pretence.

One aspect of this pessimism runs through a recent book, *Unto Caesar*, by Mr. F. A. Voigt, the well-known diplomatic journalist and B.B.C. commentator on foreign affairs. In a sense he carries both the pessimism and the disparagement of reason farther even than other exponents of the impossibility of peace. Not only is the attainment of permanent peace impossible; not only is our reason or intelligence incapable of devising any constitution or system for dealing with that problem of recurrent war in every generation to which Lord Halifax has referred, but the very desire to make the effort systematically, to have ideals in respect of it, is contrary to the will of God. In the introduction to a new edition of his book (it has gone through several editions and reprints), published since the war began, Mr. Voigt writes: "I am convinced that the crisis and the second world war to which the crisis was moving are a judgment that has come upon us because of our disobedience to the first commandment . . . that we have disregarded and continue to disregard the limitations set upon all

human endeavour, by striving to establish the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth." The European problem "can never be solved by any predetermined policy . . . nor by any ideal scheme or plan" (p. 262). "There is no universal remedy for war. . . . No system that man can devise will remove the causes of war, because these causes are inscrutable. They lie deep in the nature of man, and not in any specific economic or political system" (p. 264). An ideal is a very dangerous thing. "A national ideal is the most dangerous thing of all" leading to "the worship of Caesar. And it is immaterial if the ideal be true or not. Even its truth will be the truth of those 'who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator'" (p. 268). On these grounds are condemned all such proposals as common resistance to an aggressor, disarmament, collective security, an international air force ("a monstrous proposal"). Indeed, European peace "cannot be a primary object of foreign policy" (p. 262).

Sir Edward Grigg, sometime Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Information, has expressed vigorously and at great length, particularly in his book *The Faith of an Englishman*, similar scepticism concerning the possibility of common resistance to aggression, any plan for defending in common the victim of aggression, for upholding any general law for the defence of national freedom. He takes the curiously Pacifist view that resistance to aggression amounts to coercion of the aggressor, is as much war as aggression, and is therefore wrong. He writes:

If I am to take up arms to prove that the taking up of arms is a crime against humanity, I am surely no better than my neighbour who takes up arms merely to prove that he can use them better than I can and is therefore entitled to govern me. His object and mine, his method and mine, become precisely similar. I am to rule him by force, or he is to rule me . . . If I denounce Hitler for imposing his creed by force upon the German people and proceed in the name of progress to impose my creed by force upon him, I am surely denying and destroying that for which I myself stand and enthroning that for which I condemn my antagonist (p. 166).

Sir Edward quotes with strong approval a speech made by Mr. James Maxton to show that the erection of common power against aggression can never endure. Mr. Maxton argues that you had in 1914-18 "a great array of nations to restrain an aggressor in the interests of international law", most complete sanctions, economic and military. "You smashed Germany flat. You won. And here is the aggressor again." Having quoted that argument Sir Edward Grigg, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Information, adds:

If anyone knows the answer to that argument, he ought to produce it. None has yet been produced by the Covenanters.

Dr. L. P. Jacks, in his book *Co-operation or Coercion?*, makes this same assumption that to extend aid to the victim of aggression, to help him defend himself, is to coerce the aggressor. The League failed because it was "an attempt to impose upon sovereign states a system of coercion which their nature as sovereign forbids them to tolerate" (p. 91). Nations will and may with good morals, defend themselves individually; but if a number combine to resist in common attack upon them on the principle that an attack on one is an attack on all, at that point the defence becomes coercion of the attacker. He, too, takes the view that such combinations are certain to collapse (p. 88), since they are based on an altruism of which nations are not in fact capable.

How far this fashionable disparagement of the principle of liberty and its allied principle of law has gone, and how deep has been the undermining of hope in those conceptions; how profound the pessimism, the defeatism; the moral nihilism of certain influential circles, a few suggestive facts will suffice to indicate.

On the outbreak of the war there was appointed as Director of the Foreign Division of the Ministry of Information, Professor E. H. Carr. Professor Carr had been for twenty years in the Foreign Office, and his job at the Ministry of Information was, of course, to direct the presentation of the Allied case to the outside world; to persuade the neutrals that we did indeed stand, not merely for good principles, as against bad, but for the

general interest of mankind. Those are the things which the Prime Minister and Lord Halifax have proclaimed to the world over and over again, as the foregoing quotations from their speeches indicate.

Just before being placed in charge of the presentation of our case to the world, of the job of showing it that our cause did in truth represent law and peace and right as against lawlessness, war and wrong, Professor Carr had published a book <sup>1</sup> in which, as a Foreign Office official of twenty years' standing, he had expressed his views on those questions. In the course of it he enters into an argument with Professor Toynbee, who had written in respect of one of the crises provoked by Totalitarian aggression, that after all "international law and order were in the true interests of the whole of mankind, whereas the desire to perpetuate the reign of violence in international affairs was an anti-social desire which was not even in the ultimate interests of the citizens of the handful of states that officially professed this benighted and anachronistic creed".

Of this view Professor Carr remarks that it is an argument "compounded of platitude and falsehood in about equal parts"; going on to explain that it is "a familiar tactic of the privileged" (Britain being, in this case, the privileged), "to throw moral discredit on the under-privileged" (Germany being the under-privileged), "by depicting them as disturbers of the peace; and this tactic is as readily applied internationally as within the national community". Throughout much of the book this general view that if you are for peace it merely means that you want to keep what you've got is repeated and emphasised in various forms, thus:

"Just as the ruling class in a community prays for domestic peace which guarantees its own security and predominance and denounces class war which might threaten them, so international peace becomes a special vested interest of predominant Powers" (p. 104).

"There can be no such thing", this writer goes on to explain, "as a common or collective resistance to

<sup>1</sup> *Twenty Years of Crisis, 1919-1939* (Macmillan).

aggression, nor is it any more moral to resist aggression than to commit it, for readiness to fight to prevent change is just as unmoral as readiness to fight to enforce it."

All our high falutin' about fighting for the interests of mankind are so much bunk. We are fighting for our own interests as against the interests of the disadvantaged states. There are no "interests of mankind"; there is properly speaking no general interest. When this talk of the "general interest" is analysed, it is "revealed as the transparent disguise of selfish vested interest", thus:

"The charge is not that human beings fail to live up to their principles. It matters little that Wilson, who thought that the right was more precious than peace, and Briand, who thought that peace came even before justice, and Mr. Eden, who believed in collective security, failed themselves, or failed to induce their countrymen, to apply these principles consistently. What matters is that these supposedly absolute and universal reflexions of national policy based on a particular interpretation of national interest at a particular time. . . . As soon as the attempt is made to apply these supposedly abstract principles to a concrete political situation, they are revealed as the transparent disguises of selfish vested interests" (p. 111).

Which, of course, will be highly comforting to Dr. Goebbels and his colleagues, and, one would have supposed, extremely disconcerting to Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Halifax, who have been telling the world the exact contrary. Indeed, Professor Carr goes further still in his comfort to the enemy. He comes near to saying that we are just about as much to blame for the war as the Totalitarians. He writes:

"It is a moot point whether the politicians and publicists of the satisfied Powers, who have attempted to identify international morality with security, law and order and other time-honoured slogans of privileged groups, do not bear as large a share of responsibility for the disaster as the politicians and publicists of the dissatisfied powers, who brutally denied the validity of an international morality so constituted" (p. 289).

It is not a coincidence that Professor Carr in this same book—characteristic of so much political literature of our generation—is as sceptical of the possibility, or the desir-

ability, of liberty of opinion and discussion as he is of the possibility of an international order ensuring peace.

"Opinion, like trade and industry, should according to the old liberal conception be allowed to flow in its own natural channels without artificial regulation. This conception has broken down on the hard fact that in modern conditions opinion, like trade, is not and cannot be exempt from artificial controls" (p. 171).

"In the event of war, freedom of opinion would be subject to the same measures of constraint as other forms of personal freedom" (p. 172).

The book—again like so much literature of our generation—sharply indicts what its author terms the nineteenth-century "belief in reason", and rationalism, and liberalism. Not only is public opinion wrong-headed, but the implication is that it can never be anything else, and if it could, its wisdom would not greatly help. He is "unconvinced that wisdom can save us".

"The breakdown of the post-war Utopia is too overwhelming to be explained merely in terms of individual action or inaction. Its downfall involves the bankruptcy of the postulates on which it is based. The foundations of nineteenth-century belief are themselves under suspicion. It may be, not that men have stupidly or wickedly failed to apply right principles, but that the principles themselves were false or inapplicable. It may turn out to be untrue that if men reason rightly about international politics they will also act rightly, or that right reasoning about one's own or one's nation's interests is the road to an international paradise" (p. 53).

More than one reviewer has pointed out that Professor Carr has been greatly influenced by writers like Reinhold Niebuhr, who simply does not believe that conflict between groups can be avoided, or that justice can prevail between them, or that men in the mass are capable of justice or of wisdom. Niebuhr's views are the more significant because he is a theologian—one, that is, who expresses what he believes to be the will of God.

He insists that the way of thought, intellectual liberty, reason, which has been applied with such amazing success to the understanding and management of matter, simply cannot be applied to the understanding of society

(though of course the very books he writes, the fact that he writes it at all, is an attempt to apply that method; most elaborate reasoning, to the understanding of society). He writes: <sup>1</sup>

"The physical sciences gained their freedom when they overcame the traditionalism based on ignorance, but the traditionalism which the social sciences face is based upon the economic interest of the dominant social classes who are trying to maintain their special privileges in society. . . . Complete rational objectivity in a social situation is impossible. . . . Since reason is always, to some degree, the servant of interest in a social situation, social injustices cannot be resolved by moral and rational suasion alone, as the educator and social scientist usually believes. Conflict is inevitable."

It is quite out of the question to cure either the errors or hypocrisies of nations. The moral resources simply are not there. The errors of the years following the war will go on being repeated, century after century:

"Moralists who have observed and animadverted upon the hypocrisy of nations have usually assumed that a more perfect social intelligence, which could penetrate and analyse these evasions and deceptions, would make them ultimately impossible. But here again they are counting on moral and rational resources which will never be available. What was not possible in 1914-1918, when the world was submerged in dishonesties and hypocrisies, (the Treaty of Versailles, with its pledge of disarmament and the self-righteous moral conviction of the vanquished by the victors, being the crowning example), will hardly become possible in a decade or in a century, or in many centuries" (p. 106-7).

Mankind, indeed, must go on destroying itself by its follies for ever:

"It may be possible, though it is never easy, to establish just relations between individuals within a group purely by moral and rational suasion and accommodation. In inter-group relations this is practically an impossibility . . . the limitations of the human imagination, the easy subservience of reason to prejudice and passion, and the consequent persistence of irrational egoism, particularly in group behaviour, make social conflict an inevitability in human history, probably to its very end."

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<sup>1</sup> *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (Scribners, 1936), pp. xiv, xv.

Now, the very last thing I want to suggest is that it is wrong for Professor Carr or anybody else to write the book he has done, even though in fact Goebbels will find it a veritable gold mine. Quite the contrary. I believe that Professor Carr does a public service in compelling those whom he terms the Utopians to take stock of their beliefs; and, incidentally, with very much of what Professor Carr writes I am in most cordial agreement. (His chapter on the relation of law to peaceful change is a brilliant and most useful piece of work.) But, as the quotations already given show, the author is profoundly pessimistic about the very purposes for which we are supposed to be fighting the war: future security and peace by means of the co-operation of many states making common cause against aggression, pledged to "hang together so that they shall not hang separately".

Professor Carr may, of course, be right in his view that such co-operation can never be achieved; that it is a foolish Utopianism. But if the public as a whole shared his view we should lose this war, for we should be fighting for a cause in which we did not believe against an enemy with a cause, an evil cause, in which that enemy did believe—believed passionately, and so believing is prepared to fight fiercely, as men have so often fought with passionate conviction and heroic self-sacrifice for causes that are mistaken and evil.

Which brings us to a very disturbing fact. Professor Carr, again, may be quite right in his disparagement of the ideals which have been proclaimed so repeatedly by Mr. Chamberlain and his Cabinet as those for which we are fighting; as he is certainly right to express his views. But was it right to appoint a man of those particular opinions to direct the statement of Britain's case to the outside world? The act involves a great deal more than the making of an inappropriate appointment. It implies, especially taken in conjunction with three or four appointments of similar incongruity, that those who made the appointment do not attach importance to intellectual conviction of the rightness of the cause for which we fight; do not perhaps regard convictions, ideas, opinions as of much consequence in relation to war; particularly



ideas like those expressed by the author in question. The view that, really, ideas and opinions have no particular importance, and that consequently the preservation of intellectual liberty for the purpose of giving the ideas a chance of being sound ideas is immaterial—this view, which alone can explain an appointment like this, is after all a very common one, held by perhaps the great majority.

The next chapter will suggest that that view is for us, in our circumstances, a harbinger of defeat.

The attitude, or state of mind of these "realists" is, as we have seen, extremely defeatist as to our ultimate aims. The pessimism or defeatism is not rooted in a recognition of the material difficulties. The point of it is not that the material resources of the aggressors are too great for us to overcome, for it is plain that the actual and prospective victims of aggression have by far the greater potential power. The defeatism is rooted in the conviction that the intellectual and moral resources of the Allies are insufficient for combining, assembling, and mobilising the power which they possess; incapable of the necessary co-operations over any length of time. This pessimism is of the extreme kind which says: "Obviously, the thing could be done if men would will it, but they won't will it."

Of which it can be said that obviously these pessimists do not know, cannot know; and that it is precisely defeatist assumptions like theirs which create the very absence of will they invoke as the justification for their pessimism.

William James has a famous illustration in defence of his pragmatic philosophy. "I am climbing in the mountains", he says, "and work myself into such position that I cannot get back, and can only save myself by jumping a chasm. Can I do it? If I decide that I can, the decision gives me confidence, I make proper preparation, succeed, and my success is scientific proof, that of the event, that my decision was correct. But if I had decided the contrary, that I could not do it, had launched myself in desperation without preparation, and failed, my death would have been proof by the event

that my pessimism was justified. The difference between success and failure depended upon the degree of faith and so, of will."

Of which critics have justly remarked that if the chasm had been a quarter of a mile wide, the will could have made no difference: the climber would have been confronted by a material fact his will could not overcome.

That is not the case in our problem. In view of the fact that physically and materially the non-Totalitarian states are overwhelmingly superior to the Totalitarian, the whole problem becomes not a physical but a moral one: Have we the wisdom and intellectual capacity to combine and co-operate? Are we capable of rationalism sufficient to direct and dominate the nationalist impulses and instincts which stand in the way of several states combining for defence? Can we overcome such obstacles to a defensive confederation? The problem is one of human will. Whether we emerge from our difficulties or not will depend in the long run on that one ultimate factor. For while it may be untrue to say that where there is a will there is a way, it is certainly true to say that where there is no will there is no way. And unqualified pessimism is as destructive of the will as unqualified optimism is fatal to its useful and practical application. If your boat is above the rapids likely to be drawn over them and the occupants are so optimistically minded that they refuse to take to the oars and just drift, they are likely to be destroyed. But equally will they be destroyed if, seeing the power of the current, they decide it is folly to try to row against it. Doubt as to whether they can stem the current or not should be the signal for an attempt to try to do it, not for refusing to try. The decision to make the utmost effort *may* justify itself by success; the decision that it is not worth trying will quite certainly justify itself by disaster.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE WAY OF DEFEAT

The old nationalist ideas and their maintenance by passionate "thinking with your blood" are favourable to the enemy, but fatal to us. For we can only counter German preponderance by the co-operation of many different nations, by the development of internationalist ideas. Our public opinion can only achieve this development by retaining those habits of rational discussion which the suppression of freedom of opinion destroys. The meaning of political and intellectual freedom is thus not irrelevant to the actual waging of this war; we must understand our cause if our morale is to be equal to the enemy's. Unless we understand it ourselves, we cannot persuade other nations that our cause is theirs; and unless we can do that Germany in the end will win.

It is often implied as self-evident, a truism, that victory or defeat in war is determined by arms, armies, navies, strategy; that ideas, philosophies, ideals, however important and interesting in other connections have little bearing on the outcome of war; that this being now, what we are engaged in, all else should be forgotten.

A pretty obvious question arises. Why does Germany spend the vast sums she is known to spend maintaining the greatest propaganda machine the world has ever known, with ramifications reaching to the uttermost corners of the earth? Why does she, that is, regard the putting forward of certain ideas or arguments as so supremely important?

Consider. Here is a government made up of men who are supposed to believe that only one thing—force: bayonets, guns, soldiers, aeroplanes, submarines, mines—really counts, and that ideas, the opinions the world holds about this struggle, do not matter.

Now, foolish as Hitler and his colleagues are in many respects, they are not so foolish as all that. For

they know full well that what the world—that is to say, the neutrals great and small, America, the German people as a whole, our people—think about this struggle will ultimately determine what they do about it; how they will use their power; that “the direction in which the gun shoots” (whether at the Nazis or at their enemies) depends not on the gun itself, but on the mind of the man who uses it. Whether a given neutrality is to be benevolent or hostile or neutral, whether the German people are to put their backs into the war or subtly sabotage it, whether our people are to put their backs into it—all depends upon the ideas they hold. In other words, Hitler is clever enough to know that ideas are the foundation of action, of what men do.

He knows full well that the world is hostile to Germany, and will not willingly help her, but he knows also that that is not the end of the matter so far as propaganda is concerned. Can he prevent the world—America, small neutrals, Russia—helping the Allies, or helping them very effectively? Among his propaganda problems of the recent past have been such questions as whether he could create in the mind of some Danes or Norwegians or Dutch or Belgians (he did not have to put it into the minds of all, or even a majority) that it would be better to submit to him than fight; or, failing that, could he create such hesitations and indecisions that when they did make up their minds it would be too late? Could he raise in the minds of a sufficient number of Americans such doubts and hesitations as to make it very improbable that America would ever come in on our side?

The short answer to which questions is that not only could he do these things, but that he has either done them or is doing them, as we know to our cost.

This book is a plea for a certain way of thought, particularly in politics—a way of using our minds, that is, as against an opposite way of thought which has of late become fashionable. It contends, among other things, that unless the way of thought here advocated prevails as against that which it criticises, one incidental result will be the triumph of Germany and our defeat.

The relation between this way of using our minds and our success over Germany is not at all complicated or obscure, and is, indeed, almost self-evident, if only in our game of intellectual chess we will take the trouble to think a few moves ahead.

The situation in respect of our struggle with Germany is quite obvious. For reasons which reach back into history and geography, Germany is a large land-and-population mass, occupying a central and favourable strategic position on the Continent of Europe. The European democracies (or the nations resisting German domination) are lesser states, the largest of them not possessing even half the population at present under the control of the Nazi government. It is quite clear that if these lesser states are to stand up to Germany at all, they must combine, co-operate, not only for the purposes of the war itself, but afterwards, for preventing the "come-back" of Germany after the war.

But it is very difficult for separate independent sovereign nations to combine and co-operate for long. Deep instincts and instinctive impulses militate against it. The average man dislikes foreigners—the dislike is an old inheritance of tribal, indeed of animal times—and wants to have as little truck with them as possible; and men find it far easier and more satisfactory to yield to animal instinct—hate, herd instinct, what not—and base their conduct upon these instincts than they do to shape their course by any intellectual judgment, reflection, weighing one fact against another. This dislike and mistrust of foreigners and foreign nations is apt to flame into passions which we describe variously as nationalism or jingoism or Chauvinism. That these passions and pugnacities embodied in nationalism thus lie under the skin ready to burst out has been the most potent fact in the history of Europe during the last hundred years; quite the biggest single fact in European politics; and the root fact of the present war.

It is the root fact in many ways. Not only have these tribal instincts prevented any effective common action by Europe in facing concertedly a common danger like that of the uprising of an immensely powerful

gangster group, but that group itself has won its power by the skilful and cunning exploitation of those instincts, particularly of tribal or racial hates, tribal vanities, the lust of tribal domination. Not the least skilful part of the exploitation has been to offer to the common man, who prefers to be guided by "instinct" rather than by thought because the latter is so much trouble, the suggestion that so to act by instinct and reject thought and reason is the right way: "Think with your blood". That is a most comforting suggestion to busy and troubled folk who literally "don't know what to think".

Two ways are suggested for dealing with that situation. One, which, as the last chapter indicates, has become extremely fashionable, and which calls itself realist, might broadly be described in some such way as this:

These instincts and passions are an ineradicable part of man. He will always be guided in that way. To suppose that his character in this respect can be materially altered is sheer Utopianism, pretence, sham. We deceive ourselves when we think that conduct is or can be governed by reason, by rationality. What we call reason is the process by which we justify to ourselves the doing of what our instincts prompt. Even law and morality are mere rationalisations of our selfish interests at the moment; there is no such thing as a general principle of right, or even a general interest or social principle at all. Let us therefore be realist, drop Utopianism, recognise that long views about policy are impossible. Plans to end the international anarchy are day-dreams. The wise policy is not to attempt to end it, but by adjustments and expedients to make it work, more or less well. Let us act from day to day, trusting that our instinct will on the whole prompt the right thing—which really means the thing that falls in with our interest of the moment—and hope for the best.

If the reader thinks that this is a travesty of much of the current "revolt against reason", the anti-

rationalist, "anti-Utopian" literature of the day, he would do well to examine a few quotations given in the last chapter, and study the books from which they are taken. These views are not abstractions confined to the ivory towers of philosophers. What these writers say learnedly and with academic distinction, and distinctions, the popular Press shouts stridently without the distinctions, the shouts resulting in isolationism, anti-foreignism, anti-semitism, a profound disbelief in the possibility or desirability of any form of international co-operation, and an intensification of preference for the good old jingoism, patriotism and nationalism.

All this is precisely, of course, what Hitler would wish. He knows that as long as the lesser states remain incapable of combination against him, the ultimate triumph must be his, and he knows, further, that so long as the old irrational tribalism dominates the relationship of European states they will remain disunited, and that he will be able to dominate them; that the fierce nationalism which serves the purpose of Germany will so disunite his enemies as to enable him to destroy them in detail; that if, in other words, ~~irrationalism must dominate rationality in international~~ politics, the future is his—even though he may be compelled to a truce, as Germany was compelled in 1918.

Whether in fact reason can prevail in international affairs no man can tell. And it is not a question worth discussing.

For suppose it cannot; suppose we agree: Man is an utter fool and always will be. So be it. What are we going to do about it?

Now it is quite plain what "we"—that is the great mass of ordinary men and women—are going to do about it. When what seems to you a particularly egregious act of folly in public policy is about to be committed, you will, if you can, and if you are allowed, say that it is folly. You will have an itch so to do which you will not for long resist. That too is a fact in human nature, just as the hatred

of the heretic is a fact. You hate to hear Jones airing his views when they are not yours: but you love to air your views to Jones when they are not his. You will go on airing them. And by the resulting discussion you may be able to do your part in preventing at least that particular folly.

This insistence that man is, and always will be "foolish" has behind it the same confusion which lies behind the old question (much more common in a previous generation than it is now), "Does human nature make war inevitable?" The answer, of course, is: "Which war? Any war proposed by any idiot editor about anything?" Obviously not. To say "Man is a fool, and therefore Hitler's enemies will always quarrel among themselves, and finally give the victory to him", is not only sheer dogmatism, the assertion of something the truth of which we cannot possibly know, but it is a dogmatism upon which we are not, in any consistent way, going to act. We are not acting upon it now. Even those who for years have been saying that it is imperative for nations to combine for defence are now saying "They must do it or perish."

The Press, as I write, is full of adjurations about the need of unity with France; editors and Cabinet ministers vie with each other in declaring that this unity must be permanent, and must not disappear with the end of the war. And to-morrow, as we drive the enemy out of Norway or Denmark, we shall be saying the same thing about our relations with those countries. The thing which was beyond our wisdom yesterday is brought within reach of it to-day. Lessons like that which the war has provided can be learned; it is not inevitable that Hitler should trade upon our folly as he has traded upon the folly of his own people, provided only we apply to the learning something of the right method. That is the first and last proviso.

In order to survive we democracies must develop enough rationalism to overcome our nationalist prejudices. We can only do that by the habit of open discussion, intellectual freedom.

The case for intellectual freedom, as against the case



of the "realists" just outlined, is that the degree of reason or rationality shown in policy will depend upon the extent to which the habit of weighing pros and cons has been developed; and the development of that habit will depend upon the degree of intellectual freedom we preserve, and that in its turn upon the value we attach to it, and the corresponding discredit with which we look upon "thinking with your blood", upon violent-mindedness.

Moral attitudes are not unimportant; they are all-important. If we honour reason and its methods of toleration and open-mindedness, if we hold "thinking with your blood" in the contempt it deserves, as a yielding to savage lusts, then we shall increase the degree of rationality in conduct, including political conduct, and may perhaps bring about the international co-operations without which our cause is lost.



It is true that some of the most powerful elements of our public opinion, men placed in a position greatly to influence that opinion, officials, newspapers, publicists, deny that we can ever achieve a degree of international co-operation sufficient to enable Europe to restrain violent minded gangsters who threaten the world's peace; continue to insist that the whole conception of a defensive grouping of states to resist a common menace of aggression is Utopian, impracticable, mischievous, and (in the view of a good many) immoral, unpatriotic; that the degree of political rationality which alone could make it successful is impossible of achievement. So be it. Then how are we to win as against a dominant Germany? Or make victory permanent?

Take the last question.

Assume the victory of the present Allies—Britain, France, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Norway, Holland, Belgium, Turkey, Roumania, adding, perhaps, at the peace table, Denmark, Finland, Greece, and possibly other Balkan states. We disarm Germany, as we did before; take her fleet, as we did before; occupy much

of her territory, as we did before; demilitarise some of it "permanently", as we did before; detach certain strategic points from her permanently—a Danzig, or a Memel—as we did before. All that has been tried and failed; failed for the simple reason that if such a policy is to have any chance of success, there must be agreement among those carrying it out: the war alliance must hold together for many years after the war; there must, even for the policy of "crushing Germany", be stable international combinations. If Germany after the war is able to detach first one ally and then another—as she did after the last war—she can defy us. We may break her up into small states; we may occupy their territory; but if a whole baker's dozen of small states—Finlands, Swedens, Norways, Denmarks, Belgiums, Hollands, Spains, Polands, Czechoslovakias, Turkeys, Yugoslavias—are all left each to defend itself, you will inevitably get *ad hoc* arrangements between them, based on the principle according to which A says to B: "If we stand together, we can attack C and divide his territory between us." It began to happen before the ink was dry on some of the treaties that finished the last war; and will happen again if, when we have won the war, and done to Germany much as we did before, only perhaps much more so, and have re-established a long list of small states we say to them: "Of course we shall in future assume no obligations for your defence. We really cannot mix in your quarrels. If you are attacked, you must look after yourselves." We may say that. In which case the course of events after the next victory will be pretty much like the course of events after the last. The "realists" may be right, and we may refuse to concern ourselves with the preservation of peace—that is to say, the restraint of aggression—as obstinately after the next war as we did after the last.

If I were certain that the realists were prophesying wrongly, certain that their estimate of the limits of human folly were mistaken, certain that we should not repeat the errors of the last twenty years, I should not be writing this book at all. It would be quite unnecessary, a work of supererogation. For we could in that

case just leave things to take their course; they would come out right.

But, equally, if I were certain that things must in any case come out wrong, that the "realists" had made a correct calculation, that we were bound, whatever was said or thought, to go on making the same old errors; that human folly could never be lessened or modified by any effort of the human mind—then, equally, of course, I should not be writing this book at all. It would be quite futile.

But, unlike the "realists", I don't know, and you, dear reader, do not know, just what are the limits of human folly. And because we do know that it can be limited in some degree by appeal to experience, it is not merely worth while, but the obligation of each of us, to do his bit towards the right interpretation of experience.

It is not a quick and easy job, and won't be done at all unless we discuss experience, compare notes, exchange ideas—in other words, apply the method of freedom of thought and discussion to the field of human relations, to the political field, as we have applied it to the field of physical phenomena. If we are not to repeat the old errors, if we are to do better in the matter of creating a defensive combination than we did before, there must be intellectual and ideological preparation; we must somehow achieve an understanding of the vital need of a new outlook concerning the means of security. It won't do to get a mere uncomprehending acquiescence, in some vague ideal, as America gave a noisy, but quite uncomprehending acquiescence in the ideal of a League, during the year 1917. It was one of the causes of Wilson's failure that he did not sufficiently realise until too late that if he was to succeed in his plan it was indispensable that the American public should not only approve it but understand the reasons for it. As it was, the relative importance of the thing was so little understood in any proper sense that within a few months the squabbles of domestic politics had become for the American public far more important and far more interesting. On our side, from the same kind of

incomprehension of what was involved, we committed in the years following the war treasons to the future no less disastrous. For ten years we watched the steady deterioration of our strategic position, and shut our eyes to it because to open them would have involved admissions disturbing to ingrained prejudices. Public discussion, in so far as it took place at all, became hopelessly entangled in irrelevances. If, again, we come to the next settlement, similarly unprepared in the understanding of what is essential and what is non-essential, the same tragedy will be repeated.

But to face the real needs of the situation means, again, doing something which runs counter to existing political ideas, ideas of national independence: it means replacing nationalist by internationalist conceptions; a new conception of national duty—the duty to defend other nations victims of aggression, even if yet aggression has not reached us. We shall have to defend “No Aggression” as a principle.

This is not the place to develop fully that argument, and the present writer has done it at length elsewhere. The points which do concern us in the present context are these: First the older impulsive nationalism serves Germany's purpose but is fatal to ours; unifies her, but divides her opponents; is fatal to our purpose of combining lesser states against her. Second, it will not be easy to create the same feeling for the vital need of defending the law, the law of “no aggression” that we have for resistance to attack upon ourselves; it will be extremely difficult to revise our conceptions of “patriotism”, our firmly entrenched opinions about nationalism. Third, to do it at all, to carry through that policy of international co-operation which alone can save us and all the free democracies from Totalitarian domination, will demand both the development of a political rationality and the belief that the thing for which we fight can be achieved. Fourth, much fashionable “realism” disparages the necessary rationality and deliberately undermines the hope that the thing can be done. If these realists are right, then the future is with Germany, because her power for

aggression rests, on its ideological side, upon the older conceptions of nationalism and patriotism, domination. Our power of resistance depends upon developing a new ideology, upon modifying the old ideas. Fifth, an understanding conviction, a conviction, that is, based on intellectual comprehension of the supreme value of what we are fighting for, is indispensable to the morale without which the war itself cannot be won.

This last point deserves a little development.



Deep feeling for some cause men must have if they are to fight and endure war's torments.

We did not take up arms because *our* soil but that of a state on the other side of Europe was invaded. We defend, therefore, a certain principle, not because we ourselves had already been the victims of its violation, but because others had been; and because for the moment we believe that only by the vindication of the principle itself can our own independence be defended. We were not directly attacked; nor was France. Germany was not asking anything directly of us as she was of Poland. Germany's demands for territory, like *Italy's* and *Japan's*, have been in every case made upon others, not upon us. Germany desired keenly that we should stay out of her disputes with others (as she desired us to in 1914); insisted that she had no quarrel with us, that we had no concern in her quarrel with a third party, Poland.

We insisted that we had supreme concern: that the preservation of the principle violated in the case of Poland was indispensable to our own freedom and security. Again and again in politics certain concrete ends can only be secured by defending certain abstract principles. If—as indicated a moment ago—a foreign Power were suddenly to invade and annex some intrinsically unimportant morsel of British territory—the Seychelles Islands, say—and command us to accept this modification of the *status quo* forthwith, we should fight to the death to resist the aggression. For if we did not, if we proceeded to be “realist” and argue that, after

all, the Islands were not worth a war, that they were pretty nearly valueless and foreigners might as well have them—if we so argued after sudden and forcible seizure of British territory, the world would know that the rapid disintegration of the British Empire had begun. Our “realism” would destroy us. Unless we were prepared to defend the abstract thing, the principle of the integrity of our soil, we should very rapidly be unable to defend the concrete thing, our soil.

We, like other people, see readily enough this relation between the defence of a principle and the security of the concrete thing for which it stands, in the case of our own territorial integrity. But do we see as clearly the relation between defence of the principle of the territorial integrity of others, and our own defence? Do we really feel that if we are to defend ourselves we must defend others? That defence of what Lord Halifax has called the principle of freedom, even when others are the victim of its violation, is indispensable to our own freedom?

To become more fully conscious of that is not merely to give our own morale its true moral basis, but is to prepare the way for convincing those at present neutral that their cause is ours; and by that conviction make possible aid without which we cannot permanently triumph.

Let us summarise.

Hitler's power depends upon the maintenance and exploitation of certain prevailing political ideas: the maintenance in Europe of those ideas of nationalism which stand in the way of international co-operation; which prevent those threatened by him from acting in common or collective resistance to his aggression. So long as the disruptive forces inherent in nationalist ideas remain, Hitlerite Germany retains her preponderance.

Our defeat of Hitler depends, on the other hand, on the modification of those ideas. Unless there can be brought about such modification, Germany will in the end win, and we shall in the end lose, even if we patch up a peace once more as we did in 1918.

It is quite futile, so long as nationalist ideas remain,

to talk about disarming and breaking up Germany, and then holding her down permanently, even if that were in itself a sound policy. For in order permanently to repress her, those who beat her must remain united; and that is precisely what prevailing nationalist ideas prevent. A policy of "crushing Germany" quite as much as a policy of creating some international order into which Germany can finally be brought depends upon a capacity for international co-operation. If the Grand Alliance which defeats Germany decides to sit on her head for a generation or two, she will merely proceed to do what she has already done: smash the Grand Alliance by detaching first one Power, then another. Without some capacity for permanent co-operation among the Allies, Germany will break up the Grand Alliance which momentarily defeats her as easily as she broke up the Grand Alliance which defeated her in 1918, detaching from it three of the main Powers—Japan, Italy, Russia.

If ever this situation which exposes Europe to risk of German domination and aggression is to be remedied, it will be ultimately by means of a certain shift or change of political thinking that cannot be brought about by any means other than freedom of discussion, intellectual liberty, a certain measure of political rationalism. Without that rationalism and freedom of discussion it is impossible to show even our own nationalists and jingoes that in opposing the development of internationalist ideas they are acting as the best allies that Hitler possesses.

This has always been the problem in dealing with Germany, or any other common menace to Europe. It was the problem in the last war, and seen as such by at least some who watched the march of events.

If in the foregoing there is insistence upon certain elementary points which seem unnecessarily repetitive and wearisome, let the reader recall that they have been persistently disregarded in our policy of the last twenty years, though emphasised repeatedly by some of us ever since the last war; and that we are at war again precisely because this generation has not adequately

grasped them. Particularly has it failed to realise that there can be no secure freedom in a condition of anarchy; that if freedom is to have anything but the most precarious foundation, then free men and free nations must combine in defence of some constitutional system, law, which ensures freedom. Conditions in which each is left to be his own defender, each judge of his own rights, unconcerned at the destruction by lawless violence of the freedom of others, must ultimately condemn freedom to extinction.

All this surely is fairly plain. But the public have not seen it. And, clearly, part of our problem is not merely to discover the truth, but to discover why the public is blind to it. These are two separate and distinct problems. And if truth is to be translated into action, the second is just as vital as the first. Those of us who, for more than a quarter of a century, have proclaimed that part of the truth which the event has vindicated most tragically, have to ask why our efforts have failed.

Because they are directly relevant to that question, I make no apology for reproducing at the close of this chapter certain salient passages from a book entitled *The Political Conditions of Allied Success*, published at the beginning of 1918—six months before the close of the last war. These are the passages:

“The survival of the Western Democracies, in so far as that is a matter of the effective use of their force, depends upon their capacity to use it as a unit, during the war and after. That unity we have not attained, even for the purposes of the war, because we have refused to recognize its necessary conditions—a kind and degree of democratic internationalism to which current political ideas and feelings are hostile; and internationalism which is not necessary to the enemy, but is to us.

“For the Grand Alliance of the Democracies is a heterogeneous collection of nations, not geographically contiguous, but scattered over the world; and not dominated by one preponderant state able to give unity of direction to the group. The enemy alliance, on the other hand, is composed of a group of states, geographically contiguous, dominated politically and militarily by the material power and geographical position of one member who is able by that fact to impose unity of purpose and direction on the whole. If we are to use our



## CHAPTER V

### ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL FREEDOM

There has been a tendency among advocates of the class war to disparage political and intellectual freedom as mere bourgeois ideology, and as, in a sense, a weapon used by the Capitalists to deny the more vital economic freedom. This is a false antithesis. Political and intellectual freedom is not the enemy of economic freedom, but the instrument by which the latter can be attained. No Socialist order which had removed from the ruling class of bureaucrats or dictators the corrective of informed criticism, and removed from the mass the habit and disciplines of toleration and discussion, could possibly work effectively. The judgment which can only come from free discussion would be more necessary in a highly Socialist state than in a Capitalist or individualist one.

It will be noted that this problem of unity is discussed as a political question, a problem of modifying certain political ideas. The suggestion that the European problem is indispensably, inevitably, if not primarily, political will itself cause irritation among those who have tended to disparage political and intellectual liberty, a disparagement very widespread in so much of that Left which in an earlier generation would have been a unit in its defence.

This disparagement has arisen in part from the effort to emphasise the importance of economic freedom. It is commonly argued by Progressives to-day, first that without economic freedom political freedom is valueless, and second, that economic freedom, the removal of poverty, can only be achieved by a Socialism which must involve an increasing measure of control of the individual by the community, a lessening, that is, of individual freedom; and that *bourgeois* insistence upon such freedom is a means of keeping Socialism at bay. In this way political and intellectual freedom is usually represented

by the typical Marxist of our generation as a weapon in the class war employed on the side of Capitalism, part of that "bourgeois ideology" which it is the business of Socialism to destroy.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, it is argued, we can afford to accept the elimination of free discussion the more readily as it plays—for the determinist reasons already indicated—little or no part in the evolution and selection of ideas, which are, the determinist insists, due to economic conditions, just as ideas apart from economic forces play little part in Socialist advance. Matter, conditions, impersonal economic forces, what goes on in the outside world, not what goes on inside a man's head in discussion and the ideas resulting therefrom, determine the course of history.

It is not difficult to see how such a philosophy may slip, not only into the disparagement of intellectual freedom, but into putting intellectual and political freedom into one camp, and economic freedom into another and opposite camp: how the two freedoms may come to be regarded as mutually exclusive alternatives.

It is here suggested that this is an entirely false anti-thesis; that political and intellectual freedom is not the enemy of economic freedom, but the indispensable means for the attainment of the latter; that the two are not mutually exclusive alternatives, but mutually inter-dependent conditions of success for either; that economic freedom can never be achieved by means of a collective or socialist or planned economy unless freedom of thought and discussion, the indispensable processes of reason, are preserved; that in the absence of such freedom it is likely to become impossible to apply the scientific method to the management of society at all.

<sup>1</sup> "In their sum, these restrictions (of middle-class democracy) exclude and thrust out the poor from politics and from active share in democracy. Marx splendidly grasped the essence of capitalistic democracy, when, in his analysis of the experience of the commune, he said the oppressed are allowed, once every few years, to decide which particular representatives of the oppressing classes are to represent and repress them in politics." (Lenin, *The State and Revolution*.)

Lenin has added: "Freedom in capitalist society always remains more or less the same as it was in the ancient Greek republics, that is, freedom for the slave-owners."

The proposition, implicit or explicit in so much of current Marxism, that men, nations, classes are guided by their economic interest, or that their ways of life or their policies are determined thereby, assumes that nations and classes correctly interpret their economic interest—a conclusion which the spectacle of nationalist Europe as it exists to-day, among many another fact, flatly denies.

When we look at the world of beggar-my-neighbour, economic nationalism, impoverished by the constant pursuit of policies destructive of the interest of those who pursue them, we see clearly that men are guided not by the facts, but by what they believe to be the facts, which is almost certain to be false belief, unless they have learned to weigh evidence, to check belief in the light of experience, to correct their own conclusions by the contrary conclusions of others, and to subject the interpretation of evidence to the processes of reason and discussion.

One would assume from the tone of some Socialist, and most Marxist literature that the whole problem of abolishing poverty and inaugurating the reign of plenty consisted in the transfer of power from one class to another, the discovery of some one magic principle like common ownership, or the introduction of the exactly right economic constitution. It seems to be assumed as a matter of course that once you have abolished private property, endowed the community with a true Socialist constitution, all the rest will be added unto you automatically, without troubling about the intricate adjustment of conflicting human wills, mutual misunderstandings, psychological frictions, and difficulties generally; that the Socialist machine will work irrespective of the moral and intellectual qualities of those who compose it.

All experience shouts a protest against any such assumption.

Merely to abolish private property, eliminate the "master class", proclaim the class war against the *bourgeoisie* (which means most of the technicians, thus putting civil servants, civil engineers, scientists of various

sorts, surgeons, doctors, architects, ships' captains, navigators, cartographers, bankers, foreign traders, foreign finance negotiators, managers of foreign currency, all on the other side of the barricade), would of itself achieve nothing but chaos and famine.

Physical force giving you power over a class is an instrument which you may use well or ill. A crow-bar will give you power over an aeroplane engine or a motor-car in the sense that you can smash either to pieces. Much good may that power do you if you are ignorant of the mechanism. Merely to endow a community with a theoretically perfect Socialist constitution would of itself no more achieve Socialism or economic freedom, economic democracy, than the endowment of certain Spanish American Republics with quite perfect democratic political constitutions has resulted in political democracy for their communities. You may give to Venezuela or San Salvador the constitution of Switzerland or Sweden, but you will not by that fact get the Swiss or the Swedish result.

Having won the class war, beaten the *bourgeoisie* to its knees, and established the dictatorship of the proletariat, the real task would only then begin. There would *immediately be presented the question of how to use* victory; what the dictatorship should dictate in problems of money, banking, credit, investment, foreign trade, foreign loans (all very acute problems in Russia to-day, a quarter of a century after the arrival of Socialism), the management of the Press, the representation of trades or industries, the proper adjustment of conflicting interest between town and country, the maintenance of criminal law, questions of marriage, position of children, bureaucratic abuse, vested interest in red tape, the maintenance of redundant bureaucratic jobs, secret police and its methods, the institution of dossiers, delation, bribery, religion, drink, army discipline. . . . These problems do not solve themselves by the light of socialist nature and Marxist doctrine. They can only be solved by the right reading of evidence, often conflicting evidence, and the adjustment of conflicting interests (as Russia has had to adjust conflicting interests

of, *e.g.*: town and county). The interpretation of evidence by bureaucrats may go woefully astray, as human judgment of the infinitely simpler phenomena of matter and of the external world has so often gone astray.

The preservation of the attitude and temper of free discussion, so that a governing bureaucracy may develop the right qualities and have dangerous qualities checked, will be more, not less important in a socialist state than in a capitalist one.

This last statement is not likely to be challenged by any who have knowledge of the difficulties of working large-scale organisations, and who face with realism the nature of the human mind, its vanities, pugnacities, fears, suspicions, hostilities, hates, favouritisms, obstinacies, blind spots.

Whatever the form of the economic constitution of a society, that constitution has to be worked by individual men and women, making individual judgments, some of the judgments being necessarily of difficult and complex facts.

The problem here is not one of economic but of psychological determinism; of the working of the human mind, not the forces of the external world. The dictatorship of the proletariat will be no better than any other dictatorship if the proletariat so surrenders the "right to know", its right of access to the facts, that the control of its mind is handed over into the keeping of a little inner group of autocrats. Those autocrats will be as much subject to the corruption of irresponsible power as any other kind of autocrat; and the mass will be quite unable to control them wisely if it is the autocrats themselves who determine what the mass shall know and what it shall not.

## PART II

### MILL'S CASE FOR LIBERTY

#### CHAPTER I

### MILL'S CASE FOR LIBERTY

Because so many of this generation have forgotten and tend to distort the grounds upon which the eighteenth and nineteenth century protagonists of liberty defended it, it is useful to recall what those grounds were. They were not, as modern critics suggest, a naïve belief in the natural rationality of men. Rather was their case based on the contrary assumption that men were naturally and by the impulses of their nature, unreasonable and irrational. The necessary rationality has to be deliberately cultivated. Intellectual freedom is indispensable for that cultivation, for the creation of the type of mind necessary for a free, tolerant, humane society.

MUCH of the fashionable disparagement of eighteenth-century rationalism and nineteenth-century liberalism is based upon an evident misapprehension of the grounds upon which those philosophies rested. In quite pretentious modern works it seems to be assumed that the Voltaires and the Mills of earlier generations argued for the use of reason because they believed men to be innately and "naturally" reasonable. We are continually hearing of the "illusory optimism" of those earlier thinkers who "believed in reason", or trusted to the rationality of man, or who were "naïvely credulous" of an inevitable progress "working out as the result of natural harmonies".

Now, all this is a gross travesty of the attitude of most

of those protagonists of intellectual freedom who stand out in the intellectual history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The greatest French protagonist of freedom of thought was Voltaire; the greatest English, Mill. Neither of these men had any illusions as to the folly of mankind. It would be true to say that that folly is the very theme of nine-tenths of all that Voltaire wrote. It did not prevent him putting the briefest and most famous statement of the case for freedom for intellectual liberalism. "I loathe what you say, and disagree with all of it; and I will fight to the death for your right to say it." He saw that the only ultimate hope of correcting human folly, to prevent it assuming proportions which again and again have thrust man back into barbarism, was to go on asserting the "right to know", in just about the terms he did assert it: the right of the heretic to state his heresy, the obligation of the orthodox to listen to the heretic.

It was nearly the whole of Mill's point also. Defence of reason, the inculcation of respect for it, is so supremely important because man is naturally unreasonable; his urges, impulses, irritationalisms, pugnacities, always prompting him to revolt against reason. To encourage that revolt is intellectual treason.

Voltaire and Mill knew full well, and said, that men are usually fools, and man naturally unreasonable; and it is precisely because of this, they insisted, that it is so vital to make him see the necessity of subjecting his natural folly to the correction of a cultivated reason; and that unless he make use of such tools as contradictory discussion—unless, as against the natural impulse to refuse to listen to the critic who has the insufferable impudence to disagree with us, we impose upon ourselves the discipline of hearing contrary opinion, develop thought, harness it to our purposes—we can never hope to achieve wisdom. Not otherwise can we make possible the type of mind by which alone "free and effective society" can function.

Because this generation is so generally unaware of the nature of the case for intellectual freedom, as presented by its great eighteenth- and nineteenth-century pro-

tagonists, Mill's presentation, alike characteristic and magnificent, has been here outlined.

That outline suffices to show that he rested his case for freedom of opinion and discussion not on any natural right of men to such freedom, but mainly on the vital need of this method of ascertaining truth, and its constant use as the indispensable condition of the intellectual and moral health of a community; on the fact that there can be no sound social judgment without it.

Again and again he insists that the need for the discipline of discussion arises from the natural frailties of the human mind and the imperfections of human nature, in the natural tendency of human beings without that discipline to become utterly unreasonable and incapable of correct judgment of fact, incapable of maintaining workable systems of law and justice, incompetent to realise the Good Life. He insisted, as did most of the great advocates of freedom, whether in the Athens of Aristotle, or the France of Voltaire, or the England of Mill and Spencer and Huxley and Darwin, that freedom of opinion should be regarded not so much as a right which men are entitled to enjoy, as a discipline of which they stand in need, and are commonly most unwilling to accept.

The "discipline" involved in a regime of free discussion has been insisted upon repeatedly because the fact that this freedom does involve discipline is commonly overlooked. Yet it should be clear that the right of Smith to express his opinion means in practice that Brown and Robinson, who do not at all like the opinion so expressed, will nevertheless be compelled to listen to it in some measure. Where a Press is relatively free, and newspapers of varying opinions can be published, it is impossible for a man of one set of opinions, who travels in trains, or eats meals, or drinks with his fellows, not to have his view occasionally challenged, and so be compelled to make a choice between opposing opinions, to engage in ratiocination.

Out of that practice, and only by means of it, can come the ability to make judgments at all, to engage in any sort of thought properly speaking.



In no sphere is the exercise of that judgment more necessary, Mill argued, than in the decisions as to which liberty of action it is wise to surrender, and which preserve. That point could be put in more modern terms by saying that without the qualities of judgment which only free discussion can develop, the people will not be able to control the "interests" which otherwise would prey upon them. The public cannot competently check the preying of the interests upon it if it has not access to the relevant facts; if the necessary knowledge is withheld from it. It is no good giving "the people" power over the Government if the people have not the means of judging what the Government is doing; if the Government alone decides what the people shall be permitted to know.

Nor is the problem limited merely to the acts or oppressions of Governments. Mill knew that some of the most dangerous tyrannies were imposed not by governments, but by the public itself. He wrote:

"When society is itself the tyrant—society, collectively, over the separate individuals who compose it—its means of tyrannizing are not restricted to the acts which it may do by the hands of its political functionaries. Society can and does execute its own mandates: and if it issues wrong mandates instead of right, or any mandates at all in things with which it ought not to meddle, it practises a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself. Protection, therefore, against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough; there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling; against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them."

There is, he insists, a limit to the legitimate interference of collective opinion with the individual independence. "To find that limit, and maintain it against encroachment, is as indispensable to a good condition of human affairs as protection against political despotism."

"But, though this proposition is not likely to be

contested in general terms," he continues; "the practical question, where to place the limit—how to make the fitting adjustment between individual independence and social control—is a subject on which nearly everything remains to be done. All that makes existence valuable to anyone depends on the enforcement of restraints upon the actions of other people. Some rules of conduct, therefore, must be imposed, by law in the first place, and by opinion on many things which are not fit subjects for the operation of law. What these rules should be is the principal question in human affairs; but if we except a few of the most obvious cases, it is one of those which least progress has been made in resolving."

Mill wrote his essay eighty years ago. This remark is even truer to-day than it was then. "People," he observes, "think they know perfectly well what restrictions of freedom ought to be imposed."

"The rules which obtain among themselves appear to them self-evident and self-justifying. This all but universal illusion is one of the examples of the magical influence of custom, which is not only, as the proverb says, a second nature, but is continually mistaken for the first. The effect of custom, in preventing any misgiving respecting the rules of conduct which mankind impose on one another, is all the more complete because the subject is one on which it is not generally considered necessary that reasons should be given either by one person to others or by each to himself. People are accustomed to believe, and have been encouraged in the belief by some who aspire to the character of philosophers, that their feelings on subjects of this nature are better than reasons, and render reasons unnecessary."

And those who have taken at their face value current animadversions on the "naïve optimism" of the nineteenth-century liberals "with their belief that men act from reason", might note this passage:

"Men's opinions, accordingly, on what is laudable or blameable are affected by all the multifarious causes, which influence their wishes in regard to the conduct of others, and which are as numerous as those which determine their wishes on any other subject. Sometimes their reason—at other

times their prejudices or superstitions: often their social affections, not seldom their anti-social ones, their envy or jealousy, their arrogance or contemptuousness: but most commonly, their desires or fears for themselves—their legitimate or illegitimate self-interest. Wherever there is an ascendant class, a large portion of the morality of the country emanates from its class interests, and its feelings of class superiority. The morality between Spartans and Helots, between planters and negroes, between princes and subjects, between nobles and roturiers, between men and women, has been for the most part the creation of these class interests and feelings; and the sentiments thus generated react in turn upon the moral feelings of the members of the ascendant class in their relations among themselves.

“ Another grand determining principle of the rules of conduct, both in act and forbearance, which have been enforced by law or opinion has been the servility of mankind towards the supposed preferences or aversions of their temporal masters or of their gods. This servility, though essentially selfish, is not hypocrisy; it gives rise to perfectly genuine sentiments of abhorrence; it made men burn magicians and heretics. Among so many baser influences, the general and obvious interests of society have of course had a share, and a large one, in the direction of the moral sentiments: less, however, as a matter of reason, and on their own account, than as a consequence of the sympathies and antipathies which grew out of them; and sympathies and antipathies which had little or nothing to do with the interests of society have made themselves felt in the establishment of moralities with quite as great force.”

It is precisely *because* of these failures of reason and wisdom that Mill makes his plea for intellectual freedom, defending it thus:

“ This, then, is the appropriate region of human liberty. It comprises, first, the inward domain of consciousness: demanding liberty of conscience, in the most comprehensive sense; liberty of thought and feeling; absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects practical or speculative, scientific, moral, or theological. The liberty of expressing and publishing opinions may seem to fall under a different principle, since it belongs to that part of the conduct of an individual which concerns other people; but, being almost of as much importance as the liberty of thought itself, and resting, in great part on the same reasons, is practically inseparable from it. Secondly, the principle requires liberty of tastes and pursuits; of framing the plan of our life to suit our own character; of doing as we like, subject to such con-

sequences as may follow—without impediment from our fellow-creatures so long as what we do does not harm them, even though they should think our conduct foolish, perverse, or wrong. Thirdly, from this liberty of each individual follows the liberty, within the same limits, of combination among individuals, freedom to unite, for any purpose not involving harm to others, the persons combining being supposed to be of full age, and not forced or deceived.

“No society in which these liberties are not, on the whole, respected is free, whatever may be its form of government, and none is completely free in which they do not exist absolute and unqualified.

“Mankind are greater gainers by suffering each other to live as seems good to themselves than by compelling each to live as seems good to the rest.

“‘Though this doctrine’, he adds, ‘is anything but new and, to some persons, may have the air of a truism, there is no doctrine which stands more directly opposed to the general tendency of existing opinion and practice.’”

And he proceeds to utter a warning that men will be deprived of their freedom, not by “tyrants”, or by governments, but by themselves.

“Apart from the peculiar tenets of individual thinkers, there is also in the world at large an increasing inclination to stretch unduly the powers of society over the individual, both by the force of opinion and even by that of legislation, and as the tendency of all the changes taking place in the world is to strengthen society and diminish the power of the individual, this encroachment is not one of the evils which tend spontaneously to disappear, but, on the contrary, to grow more and more formidable. The disposition of mankind, whether as rulers or as fellow-citizens, to impose their own opinions and inclinations as a rule of conduct on others, is so energetically supported by some of the best and by some of the worst feelings incident to human nature that it is hardly ever kept under restraint by anything but want of power; and as the power is not declining, but growing, unless a strong barrier of moral conviction can be raised against the mischief, we must expect, in the present circumstances of the world, to see it increase.”

The world has indeed seen it increase; the Totalitarianism of the twentieth century is the justification of that warning by the nineteenth.

But apprehensive as Mill was, even he did not fully realise how urgent and necessary were the warnings he uttered; and to what extent they would be disregarded.

"The time, it is to be hoped, is gone by", he wrote, "when any defence would be necessary of the 'liberty of the press' as one of the securities against corrupt or tyrannical government. No argument, we may suppose, can now be needed against permitting a legislature or an executive, not identified in interest with the people, to prescribe opinions to them, and determine what doctrines or what arguments they shall be allowed to hear. This aspect of the question, besides, has been so often and so triumphantly enforced by preceding writers that it need not be especially insisted on."

The counter-revolution he feared was to be carried beyond limits even he deemed possible.

I have said in what precedes that Mill based his case for the liberty of thought and discussion, not on any Utopian belief in the inevitability of human reason prevailing, but on the ground that it would certainly fail if free opinion and free discussion were suppressed. The very basis of his whole argument was the frailty of the human mind; the need of that mind for intellectual liberty:

"The peculiar evil of silencing the expression of opinion is that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth; if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error."

It is necessary, he goes on to suggest, to consider separately these two hypotheses, each of which has a distinct branch of the argument corresponding to it. We can never be sure that the opinion we are endeavouring to stifle is a false opinion; and if we were sure, stifling it would be an evil still.

"First, the opinion which it is attempted to suppress by authority may possibly be true. Those who desire to suppress it of course deny its truth; but they are not infallible. They

have no authority to decide the question for all mankind, and exclude every other person from the means of judging. To refuse a hearing to an opinion because they are sure that it is false is to assume that *their* certainty is the same thing as *absolute* certainty. All silencing of discussion is an assumption of infallibility. Its condemnation may be allowed to rest on this common argument, not the worse for being common."

Unfortunately for the good sense of mankind, the fact of their fallibility is far from carrying the weight in their practical judgment which is always allowed to it in theory; for, "while every one well knows himself to be fallible, few think it necessary to take any precautions against their own fallibility, or admit the supposition that any opinion of which they feel very certain may be one of the examples of the error to which they acknowledge themselves to be liable. Absolute princes, or others who are accustomed to unlimited deference, usually feel this complete confidence in their own opinions on nearly all subjects. People more happily situated, who sometimes hear their opinions disputed, and are not wholly unused to be set right when they are wrong, place the same unbounded reliance only on such of their opinions as are shared by all who surround them."

Which means that "the same causes which made him a Churchman in London would have made him a Buddhist or a Confucian in Peking".

"Yet it is as evident in itself as any amount of argument can make it that ages are no more infallible than individuals—every age having held many opinions which subsequent ages have deemed not only false but absurd; and it is as certain that many opinions, now general, will be rejected by future ages, as it is that many, once general, are rejected by the present."

Mill considers the argument that when governments suppress opinions they believe to be mischievous they do not necessarily assume infallibility. He imagines a critic arguing

"Governments and nations have made mistakes in other things which are not denied to be fit subjects for the exercise of authority: they have laid on bad taxes, made unjust wars. Ought we, therefore, to lay on no

taxes, and, under whatever provocation, make no wars? Men and Governments must act to the best of their ability. There is no such thing as absolute certainty, but there is assurance sufficient for the purposes of human life. We may, and must, assume our opinion to be true for the guidance of our own conduct; and it is assuming no more, it may be argued, when we forbid bad men to pervert society by the propagation of opinions which we regard as false and pernicious.

"I answer, that it is assuming very much more. There is the greatest difference between presuming an opinion to be true, because, with every opportunity for contesting it, it has not been refuted, and assuming its truth for the purpose of not permitting its refutation. Complete liberty of contradicting and disproving our opinion is the very condition which justifies us in assuming its truth for purposes of action; and on no other terms can a being with human faculties have any rational assurance of being right."

Only by one means has man made progress towards understanding namely, that

"his errors are corrigible. He is capable of rectifying his mistakes by discussion and experience. Not by experience alone. There must be discussion, to show how experience is to be interpreted. Wrong opinions and practices gradually yield to fact and argument; but facts and arguments, to produce any effect on the mind, must be brought before it. Very few facts are able to tell their own story without comments to bring out their meaning. The whole strength and value, then, of human judgment, depending on the one property, that it can be set right when it is wrong, reliance can be placed on it only when the means of setting it right are kept constantly at hand."

In the case of any person whose judgment is really deserving of confidence, how has it become so? "Because he has kept his mind open to criticism of his opinions and conduct. Because it has been his practice to listen to all that could be said against him; to profit by as much of it as was just, and expound to himself, and upon occasion to others, the fallacy of what was fallacious. Because he has felt that the only way in which a human being can make some approach to knowing the whole of a subject is by hearing what can

be said about it by all modes in which it can be looked at by every character of mind ”

“ No wise man ever acquired his wisdom in any mode but this, nor is it in the nature of human intellect to become wise in any other manner. The steady habit of collecting and completing his own opinion by collating it with those of others, ~~so~~ far from causing doubt and hesitation in carrying it into practice, is the only stable foundation for a just reliance on it, for, being cognizant of all that can, at least obviously, be said against him, and having taken up his position against all gainsayers—knowing that he has sought for objections and difficulties, instead of avoiding them, and has shut out no light which can be thrown upon the subject from any quarter—he has a right to think his judgment better than that of any person, or any multitude, who have not gone through a similar process ”

Mill goes on to explain that it is not the feeling sure of a doctrine (be it what it may) which he calls an assumption of infallibility. “ It is the undertaking to decide that question *for others*, without allowing them to hear what can be said on the contrary side. And I denounce and reprobate this pretension not the less if put forth on the side of my most solemn convictions ”

“ However positive anyone’s persuasion may be, not only of the falsity, but of the pernicious consequences—not only of the pernicious consequences, but (to adopt expressions which I altogether condemn) the immorality and impiety of an opinion, yet if, in pursuance of that private judgment, though backed by the public judgment of his country or his contemporaries, he prevents the opinion from being heard in its defence, he assumes infallibility. And so far from the assumption being less objectionable or less dangerous because the opinion is called immoral or impious, this is the case of all others in which it is most fatal. These are exactly the occasions on which the men of one generation commit those dreadful mistakes which excite the astonishment and honor of posterity. It is among such that we find the instances memorable in history when the arm of the law has been employed to root out the best men and the noblest doctrines—with deplorable success as to the men, though some of the doctrines have survived to be (as if in mockery) invoked in defence of similar conduct towards those who dissent from *them*, or from their received interpretation ”

He reminds us that there was once a man named Socrates, between whom and the legal authorities and



public opinion of his time there took place a memorable collision. "Born in an age and country abounding in individual greatness, this man has been handed down to us by those who best knew both him and the age as the most virtuous man in it; this man was put to death by his countrymen, after a judicial conviction, for impiety and immorality. Impiety, in denying the *geus* recognized by the State; indeed his accuser asserted, (see the *Apologia*) that he believed in no gods at all. Immorality, in being, by his doctrines and instructions, a 'corrupter of youth.' Of these charges the tribunal there is every ground for believing, honestly found him guilty, and condemned the man who probably of all then born had deserved best of mankind to be put to death as a criminal."

And then that event which took place on Calvary rather more than eighteen hundred years ago: the man who left on the memory of those who witnessed his life and conversation "such an impression of his moral grandeur that eighteen subsequent centuries have done homage to him as the Almighty in person was ignominiously put to death, as what? As a blasphemer. Men did not merely mistake their benefactor; they mistook him for the exact contrary of what he was, and treated him as that prodigy of impiety, which they themselves are now held to be, for their treatment of him." The feelings with which mankind now regard these transactions, especially the later of the two, render them says Mill extremely unjust in their judgment of the unhappy actors. "These were, to all appearance, not bad men—not worse than men commonly are, but rather the contrary; men who possessed in a full, or somewhat more than a full, measure the religious, moral, and patriotic feelings of their time and people; the very kind of men who, in all times, our own included, have every chance of passing through life blameless and respected." The high priest who rent his garments when the words were pronounced, which, according to all the ideas of his country, constituted the blackest guilt, was in all probability quite as sincere in his horror and indignation as the generality of respectable and

pious men now are in the religious and moral sentiments they profess; and most of those who now shudder at his conduct, if they had lived in his time, and been born Jews, would have acted precisely as he did. Orthodox Christians who are tempted to think that those who stoned to death the first martyrs must have been worse men than they themselves are ought to remember that one of those persecutors was Saint Paul.

Mill follows with the case of Marcus Aurelius: This man, "a better Christian in all but the dogmatic sense of the word than almost any of the ostensibly Christian sovereigns who have since reigned, persecuted Christianity". Placed at the summit of all the previous attainments of humanity, with an open, unfettered intellect, and a character which led him of himself to embody in his moral writings the Christian ideal, he yet failed to see that Christianity was to be a good and not an evil to the world, with his duties to which he was so deeply penetrated. Existing society he knew to be in a deplorable state. But such as it was, he saw, or thought he saw, that it was held together, and prevented from being worse, by belief and reverence of the received divinities. As a ruler of mankind, he deemed it his duty not to suffer society to fall in pieces; and saw not how, if its existing ties were removed, any others could be formed which could again knit it together. The new religion openly aimed at dissolving these ties: unless, therefore, it was his duty to adopt that religion, it seemed to be his duty to put it down. Thus it came about that the gentlest and most amiable of philosophers and rulers, under a solemn sense of duty, authorized the persecution of Christianity. "To my mind, this is one of the most tragical facts in all history. It is a bitter thought how different a thing the Christianity of the world might have been if the Christian faith had been adopted as the religion of the empire under the auspices of Marcus Aurelius instead of those of Constantine. But it would be equally unjust to him, and false to truth," insists Mill, to deny that no one plea which can be urged for punishing anti-Christian teaching was wanting to Marcus Aurelius

for punishing, as he did, the propagation of Christianity.

Dr. Johnson, it is true, had insisted that the persecutors of Christianity were in the right; that persecution is an ordeal through which truth ought to pass, and always passes successfully, legal penalties being, in the end, powerless against truth, though sometimes beneficially effective against mischievous errors.

In meeting this Mill notes that a theory which maintains that truth may justifiably be persecuted because persecution cannot possibly do it any harm, cannot be charged with being intentionally hostile to the reception of new truths; "but we cannot commend the generosity of its dealing with the persons to whom mankind are indebted for them." To discover to the world something which deeply concerns it, and of which it was previously ignorant; to prove to it that it had been mistaken on some vital point of temporal or spiritual interest, is as important a service as a human being can render to his fellow-creatures, hardly to be requited by martyrdom.

"People who defend this mode of treating benefactors cannot be supposed to set much value on the benefit; and I believe this view of the subject is mostly confined to the sort of persons who think that new truths may have been desirable once, but that we have had enough of them now."

But indeed, the dictum that truth always triumphs over persecution is, as Mill puts it, one of those pleasant falsehoods which men repeat after one another till they pass into commonplaces, but which all experience refutes.

History teems with instances of truth put down by persecution. If not suppressed for ever, Mill insists it may be thrown back for centuries. To speak only of religious opinions: the Reformation broke out at least twenty times before Luther, and was put down. Arnold of Brescia was put down. Fra Dolcino was put down. Savonarola was put down. The Albigeois were put down. The Vaudois were put down. The Lollards were put down. The Hussites were put down. Even

after the era of Luther, wherever persecution was persisted in it was successful. In Spain, Italy, Flanders, the Austrian empire, Protestantism was rooted out; and most likely, would have been so in England had Queen Mary lived, or Queen Elizabeth died. Persecution has always succeeded, save where the heretics were too strong a party to be effectually persecuted. No reasonable person can doubt that Christianity might have been extirpated in the Roman Empire. It spread, and became predominant, because the persecutions were only occasional, lasting but a short time, and separated by long intervals of almost undisturbed propagandism. It is a piece of idle sentimentality that truth, merely as truth, has any inherent power denied to error, of prevailing against the dungeon and the stake. "Men are not more zealous for truth than they often are for error, and a sufficient application of legal or even of social penalties will generally succeed in stopping the propagation of either. The real advantage which truth has consists in this, that when an opinion is true it may be extinguished once, twice, or many times, but in the course of ages there will generally be found persons to rediscover it, until some one of its reappearances falls on a time when from favourable circumstances it escapes persecution until it has made such headway as to withstand all subsequent attempts to suppress it."

But it is not the minds of heretics that are deteriorated most by the ban placed on inquiry. The greatest harm done is to those who are not heretics, and whose whole mental development is cramped, and their reason cowed, by the fear of heresy. "Truth gains more even by the errors of one who, with due study and preparation, thinks for himself than by the true opinions of those who only hold them because they do not suffer themselves to think." Not that it is solely or chiefly to form great thinkers that freedom of thinking is required. On the contrary, "it is as much and even more indispensable to enable average human beings to attain the mental stature which they are capable of. There have been, and may again be, great individual thinkers in a general atmosphere of mental slavery. But there never has

been, nor ever will be, in that atmosphere an intellectually active people. Where any people has made a temporary approach to such a character, it has been because the dread of heterodox speculation was for a time suspended. "Where there is a tacit convention that principles are not to be disputed; where the discussion of the greatest questions which can occupy humanity is considered to be closed, we cannot hope to find that generally high scale of mental activity which has made some periods of history so remarkable. Never when controversy avoided the subjects which are large and important enough to kindle enthusiasm was the mind of a people stirred up from its foundations and the impulse given which raised even persons of the most ordinary intellect to something of the dignity of thinking beings." Of such we have had an example in the condition of Europe during the times immediately following the Reformation; another, though limited to the continent and to a more cultivated class, in the speculative movement of the latter half of the eighteenth century; and a third, "of still briefer duration", Mill reminds us, "of the Germany that once was, of the intellectual fermentation of Germany during the Goethian and Fichtean period. These periods differed widely in the particular opinions which they developed; but were alike in this, that during all three the yoke of authority was broken. In each an old mental despotism had been thrown off, and no new one had yet taken its place. Every single improvement which has taken place either in the human mind or in institutions may be traced distinctly to one or other of these periods. "Appearances have for some time indicated that all three impulses are well-nigh spent; and we can expect no fresh start until we again assert our mental freedom."

Mill sums up his case thus:

"Freedom of thought and discussion is necessary to the mental well-being of mankind (on which all their other well-being depends) for these reasons:

"First, if any opinion is compelled to silence, that opinion may, for aught we can certainly know, be true. To deny this is to assume our own infallibility.

" Secondly, though the silenced opinion be an error, it may, and very commonly does, contain a portion of truth, and since the general or prevailing opinion on any subject is rarely or never the whole truth, it is only by the collision of adverse opinions that the remainder of the truth has any chance of being supplied

" Thirdly, even if the received opinion be not only true, but the whole truth, unless it is suffered to be, and actually is, vigorously and earnestly contested, it will, by most of those who receive it be held in the manner of a prejudice, with little comprehension or feeling of its rational grounds. And not only this, but, fourthly, the meaning of the doctrine itself, will be in danger of being lost, or enfeebled, and deprived of its vital effect on the character and conduct the dogma becoming a mere formal profession, inefficacious for good, but cumbering the ground and preventing the growth of any real and heartfelt conviction from reason or personal experience "

So far Mill has only considered freedom of thought, opinion, expression and discussion

What of freedom of action ?

One of the principal reasons for maintaining freedom of discussion is that we may be competent to judge what limitations must be placed upon freedom of action. " No one pretends ", says Mill, " that actions should be as free as opinions. On the contrary, even opinions lose their immunity when the circumstances in which they are expressed are such as to constitute their expression a positive instigation to some mischievous act. An opinion that corn-dealers are starvers of the poor, or that private property is robbery, ought to be unmolested when simply circulated through the press, but may justly incur punishment when delivered orally to an excited mob assembled before the house of a corn-dealer, or when handed about among the same mob in the form of a placard. Acts, of whatever kind, which without justifiable cause, do harm to others, may be, and in the more important cases absolutely require to be, controlled by the unfavourable sentiments, and, when needful, by the active interference of mankind. The liberty of the individual must be thus far limited "

But subject to the qualification that his actions do not deprive others of their rightful freedom, the same reasons which show that opinion should be free prove also that he should be allowed, without molestation, to carry his opinions into practice at his own cost. "That mankind are not infallible; that their truths, for the most part, are only half-truths; that unity of opinion, unless resulting from the fullest and freest comparison of opposite opinions, is not desirable, and diversity not an evil, but a good until mankind are much more capable than at present of recognizing all sides of the truth, are principles applicable to men's modes of action, not less than to their opinions."

His development of this point has useful relevance to the problem of our relationship alike with Fascist as with Communist states. He says:

"As it is useful that while mankind are imperfect there should be different opinions, so it is that there should be different experiments of living; that free scope should be given to varieties of character, short of injury to others; and that the worth of different modes of life should be proved practically, when anyone thinks fit to try them. It is desirable, in short, that in things which do not primarily concern others individuality should assert itself. Where, not the person's own character, but the traditions or customs of other people, are the rule of conduct, there is wanting one of the principal ingredients of human happiness, and quite the chief ingredient of individual and social progress."

He goes on to point out that in maintaining this principle, the greatest difficulty to be encountered does not lie in the appreciation of means towards an acknowledged end, but in the indifference of persons in general to the end itself. "If it were felt that the free development of individuality is one of the leading essentials of well-being; that it is not only a co-ordinate element with all that is designated by the terms civilization, instruction, education, culture, but is itself a necessary part and condition of all those things; there would be no danger that liberty should be undervalued, and the adjustment of the boundaries between it and social control would present no extraordinary difficulty. But the evil is that individual spontaneity is hardly recognized

by the common modes of thinking, as having any intrinsic worth, or deserving any regard on its own account. The majority, being satisfied with the ways of mankind as they now are (for it is they who make them what they are), cannot comprehend why those ways should not be good enough for everybody."

Moreover, very many "reformers"—and those familiar with Soviet uniformity of opinion will appreciate the point—are sometimes little better than the Conservatives.

"Spontaneity forms no part of the ideal of the majority of moral and social reformers, but is rather looked on with jealousy, as a troublesome and perhaps rebellious obstruction to the general acceptance of what these reformers, in their own judgment, think would be best for mankind."

Few persons appreciate the meaning of Humboldt's doctrine that "the end of man, or that which is prescribed by the eternal or immutable dictates of reason, and not suggested by vague and transient desires, is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole"; that, therefore, the object "towards which every human being must ceaselessly direct his efforts, and on which especially those who design to influence their fellowmen must ever keep their eyes, is the individuality of power and development"; that for this there are two requisites, "freedom, and variety of situations"; and that from the union of these arise "individual vigour and manifold diversity", which combine themselves in "originality".

Mill agrees that it would be absurd to pretend that people ought to live as if nothing whatever had been known in the world before they came into it; as if experience had as yet done nothing towards showing that one mode of existence, or of conduct, is preferable to another. "Nobody denies that people should be so taught and trained in youth as to know and benefit by the ascertained results of human experience. But it is the privilege and proper condition of a human being, arrived at the maturity of his faculties, to use and interpret experience in his own way." It is for him to



find out what part of recorded experience is properly applicable to his own circumstances and character. The traditions and customs of other people are, to a certain extent, evidence of what their experience has taught *them*, presumptive evidence, and as such, have a claim to his deference, but, in the first place their inexperience may be too narrow, or they may not have interpreted it rightly. Secondly, their interpretation of experience may be correct, but unsuitable to him. Customs are made for customary circumstances and customary characters, and his circumstances or his character may be uncustomary. Thirdly, though the customs be both good as customs, and suitable to him, yet to conform to custom merely *as* custom does not educate or develop in him any of the qualities which are the distinctive endowment of a human being.

“He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him has no need of any other faculty than the ape like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself employs all his faculties. He must use observation to see, reasoning and judgment to foresee, activity to gather materials for decision, discrimination to decide, and, when he has decided, firmness and self control to hold to his deliberate decision. And these qualities he requires and exercises exactly in proportion as the part of his conduct which he determines according to his own judgment and feelings is a large one. It is possible that he might be guided in some good path, and kept out of harm's way without any of these things. But what will be his comparative worth as a human being? It really is of importance not only what men do, but also what manner of men they are that do it. Among the works of man which human life is rightly employed in perfecting and beautifying, the first in importance surely is man himself.”

Supposing, Mill asks, it were possible to get houses built, corn grown, battles fought, causes tried, and even churches erected and prayers said, by machinery—by automata in human form—it would be a considerable loss to exchange for these automata even the men and women who at present inhabit the more civilised parts of the world, and who assuredly are but starved specimens of what nature can and will produce. Human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do,

exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing.

Mill's argument for individuality of character has especial value in a world where controls are necessarily extended, and where the tendency for men to be forced into a single mould necessarily grows stronger. And his plea is suggestive in view of what we have seen happen in Germany, where in truth a whole nation have been reduced to automata, even in their most profound "convictions".

For years seventy million people are told, and teachers and journalists and professors daily proclaim to the multitude that Bolshevik Russia is the enemy of mankind, of all civilisation, and most particularly the eternal enemy of Germany, who (all this is solemnly set forth in *Mein Kampf*) would write her own doom if she attempted any sort of alliance with the Bolshevik Beast. "The nation that allies itself with Russia", declared Hitler, "becomes by that fact the enemy of Germany."

All this is for years accepted as profound truth; an eternal verity. Then, one Monday morning, the Leader announces that he had made an alliance with the Beast, and will the German people please renounce all they have been taught to believe on this matter, and kindly believe the opposite. Which, thereupon, the teachers, the journalists, the writers, and the professors duly proceed to do. Such is the habit of acquiescence. Where there is such acquiescence there can be no freedom, for there can be no free men—men free of the pressure of the mass and the mob—to stand out for freedom. Where the possibility of difference from others does not exist freedom cannot exist.

And Mill very rightly points out how little the run of men value originality—how much indeed they are apt to resent it. He says:

"I insist thus emphatically on the importance of genius, and the necessity of allowing it to unfold itself freely both in thought and in practice, being well aware that no one will deny the position in theory, but knowing also that almost every

one, in reality, is totally indifferent to it. People think genius a fine thing if it enables a man to write an exciting poem, or paint a picture. But, in its true sense, that of originality in thought and action, though no one says that it is not a thing to be admired, nearly all, at heart, think that they can do very well without it. Unhappily this is too natural to be wondered at. Originality is the one thing which unoriginal minds cannot feel the use of. They cannot see what it is to do for them: how should they? If they could see what it would do for them, it would not be originality. The first service which originality has to render them is that of opening their eyes; which being once fully done, they would have a chance of being themselves original. Meanwhile, recollecting, that nothing was ever yet done which some one was not the first to do, and that all good things which exist are the fruits of originality, let them be modest enough to believe that there is something still left for it to accomplish, and assure themselves that they are more in need of originality the less they are conscious of the want."

Mill goes on to point out that whatever homage may be professed, or even paid, to real or supposed mental superiority, the general tendency of things throughout the world is to render mediocrity the ascendant power among mankind. In ancient history, in the Middle Ages, and in a diminishing degree through the long transition from feudality to the present time, the individual was a power in himself; and if he had either great talents or a high social position, he was a considerable power.

"At present individuals are lost in the crowd. In politics it is almost a triviality to say that public opinion now rules the world. The only power deserving the name is that of masses, and of governments while they make themselves the organ of the tendencies and instincts of masses. This is as true in the moral and social relations of private life as in public transactions. Those whose opinions go by the name of public opinion are not always the same sort of public; in America they are the whole white population; in England chiefly the middle class. But they are always a mass—that is to say, collective mediocrity. And, what is a still greater novelty, the mass do not now take their opinions from dignitaries in Church or State, from ostensible leaders, or from books. Their thinking is done for them by men much like themselves, addressing them or speaking in their name, on the spur of the moment, through the newspapers."

"I am not complaining of all this," adds Mill. "I do

not assert that anything better is compatible, as a general rule, with the present low state of the human mind. But that does not hinder the government of mediocrity from being mediocre government. . . . In this age the mere example of non-conformity, the mere refusal to bend the knee to custom, is itself a service. Precisely because a tyranny of opinion is such as to make eccentricity a reproach, it is desirable, in order to break through that tyranny, that people should be eccentric. Eccentricity has always abounded when and where strength of character has abounded; and the amount of eccentricity in a society has generally been proportional to the amount of genius, mental vigour, and moral courage it contained. That so few now dare to be eccentric marks the chief danger of the time." Well, it certainly does in Germany and Russia.

The greater part of the world has, properly speaking, no history, in Mill's view, because the despotism of Custom is complete. This is the case over much of the East. "Custom is there, in all things, the final appeal; justice and right mean conformity to custom; the argument of custom no one, unless some tyrant intoxicated with power, thinks of resisting. And we see the result. Those nations must once have had originality; they did not start out of the ground populous, lettered, and versed in many of the arts of life; they made themselves all this, and were then the greatest and most powerful nations of the world. What are they now? The subjects of dependents of tribes whose forefathers wandered in the forests when theirs had magnificent palaces and gorgeous temples, but over whom custom exercised only a dividend rule with liberty and progress. A people, it appears, may be progressive for a certain length of time and then stop: when does it stop? When it ceases to possess individuality."

In view of the German experience outlined a page or two back, the following forecast by Mill is indeed shrewd:

"If a similar change should befall the nations of Europe, it will not be in exactly the same shape: the despotism of

custom with which these nations are threatened is not precisely stationariness. It proscribes singularity, but it does not preclude change, provided all change together.

“We continually make new inventions in mechanical things, and keep them until they are again superseded by better; we are eager for improvements in politics, in education, even in morals, though in this last our idea of improvement chiefly consists in persuading or forcing other people to be as good as ourselves. It is not progress that we object to; on the contrary, we flatter ourselves that we are the most progressive people who ever lived. It is individuality that we war against: we should think we had done wonders if we had made ourselves all alike; forgetting that the unlikeness of one person to another is generally the first thing which draws the attention of either to the imperfection of his own type, and the superiority of another, or the possibility, by combining the advantages of both, of producing something better than either.”

## PART III

### LIBERTY IN PRACTICE

#### CHAPTER I

#### OPINIONS NOT FACTS RULE THE WORLD

The kind of world we live in depends upon the kind of ideas we develop, the quality of our minds. The case for intellectual liberty is that without freedom of thought and discussion the quality of the human mind is bound to be bad. The problem of public folly cannot be solved by dictatorship, for the quality of dictatorship itself will depend upon the mass mind. Dictators do not create themselves. They are created by the mass over whom they rule, and from whom they derive their power.

THE world of politics is ruled by opinions about facts, *not facts*. Or, if you prefer, in politics opinions are the chief facts. And the problem of politics is to discover by what means the opinions of the mass of men may be relatively sound opinions, giving rise to policies that are workable, rendering the intended results.

There can be no hope that that will be the case unless men can be brought to apply to their social, economic, and political relations the same means of ascertaining truth which they have applied with such amazing success to the physical world, to matter. A certain strange contrast has often been noted: in the physical world of wireless, mechanics, steam, electricity, aeroplanes, we have achieved things which would make the Athenian of old look upon us as gods. But our understanding of human relations (as illustrated, say, by the leading article of some popular two million-a-day newspaper, discussing international politics) would prompt the same Athenian to decide that we were a race of imbeciles. For he,

twenty-five centuries ago, with no printing, no telegraphy, no wireless, at least knew better than that.

The reason for the contrast is not far to seek. It is relatively easy to apply freedom of thought, enquiry, discussion in which heresy is welcomed—the scientific method, that is—to the understanding of matter. We have done it, with the results we see in the physical world. It is extremely difficult to apply that same scientific method—freedom of thought and discussion, that is—to social and political problems, for we ourselves are the raw material we would manage. To that material we have not applied the scientific method, with the results that we see in the present state of the world.

Without the application of that method to the physical realm, the conquest of nature, the modern world as we know it, the world of invention and technical advance, could never have come into being. Those miracles of science have only been possible because a few individuals questioned the conclusions of authority; questioned ancient and revered doctrine—"the wisdom of the ages". Their questioning, this spirit of free enquiry, was even in the sphere of physical science for many centuries after the collapse of Rome regarded as impious and wicked, and the whole apparatus of State and Church was invoked often in their suppression. But these protagonists of free opinion persisted, and we had the Renaissance. These heretics, as Lecky has pointed out, turned the moral values of the time upside down. What had for ages, by nearly all men, been regarded as vice, the scientific innovators regarded as virtue; and what authority had regarded as virtue, the scientists' method treated as vice. To doubt, to require evidence for belief, to adopt a critical attitude towards belief based on authority, had for centuries been looked upon as subversive and immoral. If authority had had its way, if the suppressions and inquisitions had been successful, the modern world could never have existed.

This ruthless suppression of free enquiry was not due to the wickedness of rulers but to the innate nature of the mass of men—a nature which it is our job to guide and nurture by purposeful cultivation, just as it is our job to conquer the external world of soil and climate. Most men

would far rather imprison a critic than listen to him; than have their comfortable convictions—sometimes the cherished convictions of a life-time—rudely disturbed. “There ought to be a law against it”, and such disturbers of a man’s peace put away. Early man made no bones about it; the violator of the tribal taboo was “liquidated” with all the dispatch of a modern Ogpu or Gestapo. It was as grave an offence to question whether the sacrifice of a maiden to the sacred crocodile would stop the pestilence or make the rain come, as it was to question the sacredness of the crocodile.

How long it took man to discover the value of listening to unorthodox opinion may be gathered from this. Anthropologists estimate that between the time when man first began to use the flint knife, and the time that he discovered that by binding his knife to the end of a stick he had another and better tool, was at least a hundred thousand years—a hundred times the period that separates us from the Norman conquest. Yet, biologically—in the physical quality of his brain—he was the modern man. Indeed, we know that you can take the child of a Stone Age nian from a North American tribe and bring him up under the modern conditions of a Massachusetts education, and enable him to absorb the technical knowledge of the modern world to such extent that as an engineer and physicist he outdoes his white competitors.

If it took early man a hundred thousand years to advance from the stone knife to the stone axe, it was not from disability arising from the physical nature of his brain, but from fear of heresy: his failure to discover the value of an intellectual tool which we now call the scientific method.

But it is, after all, much easier to demonstrate error in the field of physical science, to give proof of such things as the rotundity of the earth, and so compel authority to get out of the way of truth and welfare, than it is to prove error in the field of social and political and even economic policy. Authority, orthodoxy, have a far better chance of getting away with assumptions of infallibility in this latter field. In the suppression of heresy in political and social doctrine the instincts of the



multitude support authority. And it is not possible for a social scientist to go into a laboratory and prove by the deposit in a test tube, or by the photograph of a bacterium, that the prevailing orthodoxy imposed by the Government with its Ogpu or Gestapo is wrong.

The majority, and so authority, is immensely more likely to err in the realm of social and political doctrine, just because passions, fanatical belief, opposing interests, are involved. Yet it is precisely in this more difficult field that the new inquisitions and the new Popes assume infallibility. Stalin and Hitler pronounce the true doctrine; decide on pain of death and torture, that it shall not be questioned; decide what facts the millions shall be allowed to know, and what they shall not be allowed to know concerning those doctrines.

And the new inquisitions are immensely more powerful, more efficient, more omnipresent than the old, because they possess instruments so immeasurably more efficient for reaching the mind of the million. It will be easier for the new Popes to crystallize error.

From the day that a child is born in Germany or Russia, and to a lesser extent in Italy, it is brought under the influence of the State's doctrine; every teacher teaches it through the years of childhood and adolescence. In every conscript, whether military or industrial, the process is continued; every book suggests the prevailing orthodoxy; every paper shouts it; every cinema gives it visual suggestion.

The effect of the process is, of course, to worsen the quality of the mass mind; to render it less and less capable of sound judgment.

The protagonist of dictatorship argues that the quality of the mass mind does not matter because the dictator rules and the mass have only to obey. But the kind of dictator that a people gets will depend upon the way that a people thinks—upon, again, the quality of its mind.

Indeed, we miss the essence of this matter, and make the very mistake against which it is the purpose of this book to utter a warning, if we conceive the problem as one merely of undermining authority; if we think of it as a conflict between the "people" "struggling to be free" on the one side, and governments, or autocracies,

or dictatorships, on the other "holding the people in subjugation by physical force". This picture of "Tyrants v. People", though popular, is an essentially false picture of the facts—upon reflection quite obviously false. "The Tyrant" cannot impose himself by his personal physical force upon tens of millions of men; the force is on the side of the millions.

The fact that a dictator does not and cannot impose himself by his own force, but only by such force as he can persuade the people to furnish him, is important just because so very often the plea for free discussion as a necessary condition of a healthy public opinion is met by the argument that what the public thinks does not matter; that governments are made and controlled by powerful "interests" which it is impossible for the public to resist, that we owe Hitler to the money of the German manufacturers.

Assume that millions were poured by wealthy industrialists into Hitler's coffers, how was that money employed? How was it made effective for the enslavement of the people, the public? It was employed mainly to secure instruments for reaching and influencing the public mind, public opinion: the purchase of newspapers, propaganda, what not. If the public mind had not been of a certain quality, no amount of puffing and propaganda could have put across the revolting nonsense that so many million Germans seem to have swallowed.

Some years ago a book was written to prove that practically all wars were due to the desire of fifty armament makers to keep up profits. (One wonders a little whether the theory quite covers the war waged by Russia upon Finland.) That fifty armament-makers are quite willing to give the order to go to war is doubtless true. But why are fifty millions, or five hundred millions willing to obey fifty obese gentlemen in Lombard Street or Wall Street? It would doubtless serve the purpose of very powerful interests—building and allied trades—if the City of London were burned down. But they could never persuade the citizens of London to do it, because the case for the burning down of our cities is not so readily subject to emotional and other confusions as is the case for national armament.

The "interests" are able to exercise the influence they do largely by reason of the ease with which public opinion can be bamboozled, especially where emotions like nationalism can be exploited. To control the mass of the people they have to act through the minds of the millions, and can do it in no other way.

The French just now have been saying that though Hitler made the war the Germans made Hitler. This is true. Hitler could not have made himself. His party, which at the beginning was thirteen, became a party of thirteen millions, because thirteen million Germans approved or acquiesced in his doctrines. Had they not done so, had those thirteen millions regarded the doctrines as mainly wicked nonsense certain to involve Germany in disaster, Hitler's party would have remained a party of about thirteen, and he would not have become, by virtue of the popularity of his appeal to so many Germans, first a power, and then *the* power of Germany. It may not be true, of course, that all Germans, or even most Germans, approve of Hitler or his doctrines. But if the majority disapprove them they have demonstrated political incompetence and even impotence; have shown that though they make part of the power which executes Hitler's orders and policy in Europe, they cannot act as part of the power which would prevent that policy; that the "better Germany" is impotent to prevent domination by the worse. If that is so (and it may be), it presents a strong case for the domination of Germany by some outside combination until such time as the "real Germany", or "the better Germany", has learned to keep its criminal minority in order.

In any case the event shows that dictatorship is no remedy for democratic shortcomings, for the political incompetence of the mass. It shows that given a defective political judgment on the part of the mass, the defects will be reflected in the dictatorship; that where the better have not learned to keep the worse in order, it is the worse who will rule; rule through the dictator, as the dictator will be increasingly obliged to rule through those worse elements, through their violence and terror. The better elements would boggle at the kind of thing with which

the OGPU and the Gestapo have made us familiar—the spyings, the beatings to death, the tortures. And by employing such instruments the dictator himself will become in some measure their victim; for he will fear them more than he fears the better; will consequently lean towards their policy, even if he would prefer that of the less violent.

If—the supposition is at least arguable—Hitler's crusade, with its crude appeal to racial vanities, brutalities, its theories of *lebensraum*, could not have succeeded in Britain, or America, it would have been largely because in these countries the public would not react as it did in Germany to those appeals. Hitler has indeed had imitators in Britain, who have made the same kind of appeal, and the response has been derisory. If, for any reason, this feature of public opinion in Britain should change and millions began to join the party of a British Hitler, then "interests" would possibly begin to support him, and he might become a very grave danger. The danger would have been created by a certain development of public opinion, a development without which the "interests" in this respect would have been (as they now are) powerless for mischief.

But if to call attention to that fact is comforting to our complacency, there is another fact much less comforting, bearing on the present discussion, which we must also face, since it affects vitally the political strategy of the present struggle and the final purpose and prospects of the democracies, confronted by Nazi, or Nazi-cum-Soviet power.

We have seen how the political incapacity or incompetence of Germans, the internecine struggles of small political parties within Germany (there were over a hundred at the time of Hitler's arrival), unable, despite the mechanical "discipline" which is the pride of Germans, to co-operate effectively to the common end of resisting a brutal oppression, ended by delivering the country over to a government of gangsters which only a minority outside those young enough to have been conditioned in childhood or adolescence to the new order actively approve.

But the Western democracies have also done that precise thing, have been guilty of an identical political incompetence in an only slightly different form. We too have allowed our lives to be ordered by that same gang of neurotics, fanatics and criminals because of our crude political incompetence. We too have had utterly to change our way of life, uproot treasured institutions, devote them to purposes which we detest, to spend our treasure, waste our youth, at the behest of a relatively small group, whether we regard that group as Hitler's entourage, the Nazi party, or the German nation; a group infinitely less powerful potentially than are those whose lives it so grievously disturbs.

Germany is a deadly menace to non-German Europe. Yet, non-German Europe means the overwhelming majority of Europeans, with a preponderance of potential power also overwhelming. The potentially more powerful majority go in daily fear of a relatively small minority. Why? Simply because the majority, the greater part, has not sufficient political competence to organise its power, to mobilise it, to use it to the ends of order, civilisation, law, the restraint of abominable crime.

Europe is unable to use her forces for the restraint of crime which threatens her common defence because the political judgment of her peoples is defective. Her public opinion, blinkered by nationalism, has for twenty years been unable to grasp the simplest facts of the situation. For generations all proposals that Europe should co-operate in defence against just such common danger as that which now confronts us has been wrecked upon the rocks of nationalism, chauvinism, isolationism, or sheer conservatism. Political judgment has proved itself unequal to the task which faced it. For generations the one policy or doctrine which might have saved Europe from its present scourge has been regarded as an insufferable political heresy. The cheapest and silliest demagoguery has sufficed to silence it, or to silence it to such degree that its case failed to reach the big public. We are at war to-day because the common man of Britain and Western Europe generally has found certain unfamiliar conceptions in politics so distasteful that he

would not consider them dispassionately even for a moment.

Whether the heresy, the unfamiliar and thus distasteful idea was labelled internationalism, or collective security, or Pacificism, or League of Nations, it was enough that it meant bargaining with foreigners, "surrendering our national independence to the talking shop at Geneva" (the refusal so to do has made us so completely independent that the ordering of our whole national life depends on what two or three persons in Berlin or Moscow may decree). However we may analyse the causes of the failure of judgment, that failure of judgment there has been we all agree. It has expressed itself in disastrous event.

The failure is not special to the European Democracies. In May, 1940, in America, the politician who favoured intervention took his political life in his hands. A month later opinion completely changed. Yet all along everyone knew that if Germany should overwhelm France and Britain, and on the strength of that victory create a German-Russian-Japanese combination for the division of the world, America would then, when the risks were at their maximum, intervene, as Britain, where for years public opinion was violently hostile to any guarantees in Eastern Europe, suddenly abandoned that view and intervened when the risks were at the maximum. American policy, on the morrow of the defeat of France or Britain or both, would simply duplicate the course of British policy, which, refusing to support collective security when the risks were very small, suddenly espoused that policy when the risks had become appalling.

To summarise. If the nature of public opinion, the quality of political thought among the mass, has put Germany at the mercy of gangsters, the quality of public opinion among the Western democracies on one particular aspect of politics threatens to put them, the democracies, at the mercy of Germany; to make the majority in Europe subservient to its worst minority.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ULTIMATE PRICE

If the price of freedom is eternal vigilance, it is vigilance over our own impulses, for the history of the last twenty years reveals that the most dangerous enemy of democracy is demagoguery. We have had government by pander. We may best preserve democracy by realising that the voice of the people is quite often the voice of Satan. To question that voice within ourselves, to refuse "to think with our blood", to realise the moral obligation to use intelligence; to realise that the quality of our society is determined by the quality of our minds, that the preservation of the particular skills which will enable those minds to be efficient social instruments—this is the fundamental condition of progress.

MEN seem incurably anxious to get some means of salvation outside their own behaviour and character, the quality of their own minds. There must be, they seem to say, some plan or scheme or constitution or doctrine which, once subscribed to, will work automatically, without further need of thought or effort on their part.

It is not true. You may give men a Christian doctrine, and a corrupt church will turn it into a means of enslavement; a Holy Writ, and slave-holders will make it the sanction of slavery; a liberal constitution, and in its name all freedom will disappear. All these things will happen if the people, the millions, do not understand the purport of the religion, the meaning of the doctrine, falsely interpret the Holy Writ, misuse the constitution. Unless we have the judgment to use those things well, none of them can do anything for us. Indispensable to the good use of any is understanding, intelligence, and our task is to find the few essential conditions for the preservation of that understanding mind, the clarification of the intelligence.

The price of freedom may be eternal vigilance, but in that case it is vigilance over ourselves and our impulses; first and last this impulse to suppress those who do not share our opinions. The worst enemies of freedom are not governments, but those qualities in the minds of the people which make it so pathetically easy to secure their approval of the measures which destroy the health of their society. Fortunately, to be aware of what the dangers are is half the battle in overcoming them.

It serves little purpose to assert rights unless we are aware of the obligations necessary to their preservation. The price of the right to assert our view is a firm sense of the obligation to let others assert contrary views, and to listen to them; to make the first impulsive thought subject to the second more disciplined thought; to face the fact that the voice of the people (which is you and me) is usually the voice of Satan; that we are subject to pugnacities, passions, prejudices which it is our duty to see do not run away with us. We may have faith in the mind of man if only the mind and not "the blood" is our guide.

Everyone now agrees that during the last twenty years we have been guilty of very grave errors of foreign policy; that we lost the peace not so much because of the nature of the Treaty of Versailles, as of the nature of the policy which followed it, particularly owing to the fact that again and again we have done late what we ought to have done very much earlier. One thinks of such examples as our Reparations policy. At Lausanne in 1932 we virtually wiped out our claims to Reparations because we—the public—saw at long last that the maintenance of the claims, plus the conditions we imposed, would be ruinous to our interests. But for fourteen years previous to that date men of authority like Mr. Keynes had been urging that very step—urging that the maintenance of the Reparations claims would render infinitely more difficult the recovery of Europe from the war; worsen and prolong the post-war disorganisation, increase the chances of upheaval. Had we done at the peace what Mr. Keynes urged us



to do (and which we did years afterwards), Germany and Austria might have been able to avoid the worst miseries of the inflation, the depression would have been immeasurably less severe, the Weimar Republic might well have survived, and we might never have heard of Adolf Hitler.

And what is true of Reparations—that we did late what we should have done early—is true of a score of important features of post-war policy. For years we refused to guarantee European frontiers; to undertake to defend them against aggression. Then, suddenly, from one day to another, we decided to do it in the case of Poland. The result was war. If we had made a reality of the policy of mutual guarantees of assistance ten or fifteen years earlier (before Hitler had come to power), the result would have been peace. As it was, we yielded again and again to Hitler what we had refused to the Weimar Republic. Errors, if not of the same kind, at least of the same gravity, have marked our relations with France, America, Japan, Italy, Russia, Poland, Czechoslovakia. It is the sum total of that long list of repeated errors which explains why we lost the peace.

Now, when someone's conduct is repeatedly marked, in many different cases, by the same kind of fault, we know that the reason is not likely to be in some special circumstance of each case, but in some general characteristic of his behaviour. So here. If we enquire why we have gone on making the same kind of mistake—indispensable decisions too long delayed—we shall find it in certain characteristics of democracy which the friend of democracy will face frankly and squarely, because if they are so faced the difficulty can be overcome. And only if they are so faced.

If it took fifteen years for us to do the sensible thing about Reparations, or guarantees to France, or undertakings for the defence of lesser states, or the recognition of our interest in resisting aggression as such, irrespective of whether we or others were the victims, it was because wrong policies can usually be supported by appeals to prejudice, passions, superficial emotion,

popular pugnacities, while the right policy demands a second thought, a bit more reason, perhaps a bit more knowledge; because, in other words, it is often easier in politics to defend popular folly than advocate less popular wisdom. And that being the case, a certain type of demagogue, political or journalistic, makes it his business to profit by exploiting the foolish, but more easily understood, view as against the wise one slightly more difficult to understand; by exploiting the first thought as against the second, sensation as against sense, hysteria as against sober-mindedness. In other words, there is a tendency for demagogy to dominate democracy, and, if unchecked, ultimately to destroy it—as in Germany.

Take this Reparations business. When a demagogue like the late Horatio Bottomley, or a stunt paper, starts a rampage to "make Germany pay the whole cost of the war", the suggestion as a first thought is naturally welcome to a public faced with heavier taxation than they had ever known before. Moreover, it seems common justice. And when a Keynes or anyone else points out that Germany can only pay by a vast expansion of her export trade, the reflection is at first an irritating one. Yet, it was true; and it was quite clear from the beginning that we did not intend to permit vast imports of German goods, and we began, indeed, to discuss tariff increases to prevent it. In other words (like the Americans a little later in the matter of Britain's debt to them), we insisted upon the performance of an act, while at the same time imposing conditions which made its performance impossible. The Germans have a phrase for it: "You must wash me, but you mustn't make me wet."

But the demagogue Press of the day—largely under the leadership then of the *Daily Mail*—took very good care that the public should never understand the argument. Those who tried to present the truth in this matter were represented as desiring to let Germany off the penalty of her crime; they were covered with abuse, "lynched". So with other details of post-war policy. When certain people in England desired to join with

certain American organisations after the war in saving the children of Vienna and Berlin from the famine which then threatened, and some Austrians came to London to take part in a conference, the *Daily Mail* started a violent campaign of protest. It gave the names and addresses of the London hosts of the visiting Austrians so that mobs could collect and demonstrate. The people who had organised the "Save the Children Fund" were hounded like criminals. It is difficult, afterwards, to believe that that sort of thing could occur; but it did.

In the Reparations business, where it took the British public fifteen years to make up its mind to sanction the sensible course, the issue was in fact extremely simple.

There was certainly nothing obscure or puzzling in it to the financial advisers of the Governments that met in Paris in 1918. It so happens that the present writer had raised this very question, discussed the dilemma involved, as part of the problem of the economics of war, several years before the war, and a great deal of controversy had arisen between economists touching the point. The experts advising the various Governments, correspondents in touch with those experts, the editors in touch with the correspondents, were all aware that the amount Germany could pay must be measured by the amount of German goods or services that could be absorbed *outside the German frontier* without damage to the Allied commercial organisation. Anyone who discussed the question seriously for half an hour knew that it was no good basing what Germany could pay on the value of her public buildings, the receipts of her railways, the amounts spent in theatres and cafés, and that particularly it was no good talking about Germany paying the whole cost of the war. If she should build up a foreign trade as great as that of all Europe and America combined she could not do it. And to ask the impossible was to kill the chances of getting the possible.

The "big public" of tubes and 'buses and tea-shops, as distinct from those nearer to the centre of things,

had not yet grasped that point, and there was a perfectly natural hesitation in admitting it too readily. The notion that the criminal could not be made to pay for the havoc he had caused, and that we should have to foot the bill ourselves, was not a pleasant fact to face. All the more reason for checking the natural tendency to nurse an illusion which might make an already precarious position still worse. To perpetuate chaos on behalf of mythical billions we could never get, was to sacrifice what we might get; uselessly to increase our own difficulties and dangers.

At the beginning of the 1918 election, Mr. Lloyd George obviously wanted to have his hands free as to the indemnity which should be demanded of Germany. (At the Armistice we had given an undertaking to the enemy that the amount to be claimed should be limited to damages done to the civilian population.)

If the Press, as a whole, had told just the simple truth about this matter, brought the essential facts home with the same insistence which they had had to employ during the war on a hundred subjects—economy, food, clothing, and the rest—the whole story of the reparation problem would have been a different one.

But instead of the truth being told, we know what happened. The popular papers, headed by the Northcliffe Press, started a "ramp", a "stunt". Germany must be made to pay the *whole* cost of the war. "He has not said it, he has not said it," they yelled. The Premier tried hard for a time not to say it. But the stunt Press won the day. He "said it".

But the deception did not end with the election. There followed nearly four years of negotiation, during which the greater part of our Press continued to hide systematically this extremely simple point that the extent of possible indemnity did not rest ultimately upon the Germans alone, but upon our policy; upon the extent to which it would be to our advantage to allow or encourage the growth of German foreign trade.

The most powerful section of our Press consistently did its best to keep from its readers the one fact which in the interest of European peace it was necessary to impress

upon them. Many aspects of the economic problem in Europe are obscure and difficult. This crucial point was clear and simple. We wanted Germany to pay a certain large sum; she could only do so by greatly expanding her foreign trade. And that we would not permit.

The answer to the question why public opinion defied the self-evident is that it had unfortunately become an organised industry to exploit existing prejudice by withholding the very simple facts which might destroy that prejudice. Here was a simple truth, the more general realisation of which might have accelerated enormously the new organization of Europe and the solution of our own pressing economic problem. Not only did some of our largest papers not emphasise this truth; they persistently hid it, and not only persistently hid it, but persistently implied the exact contrary. Any day you might read stories of the way in which "money that ought to go to the Allies" was being spent upon public improvements, theatres, country excursions. "Why don't the Allies tax German amusements?"

It is a "little too thick" to assume that after years of discussion, of Banker's Reports, expert explanation, the correspondents who sent this kind of thing, the editors who printed it, did not know that it had no bearing on the question of what Germany could pay; did not know that the printing of it merely helped to keep alive a confusion of mind that paralysed the action of statesmen and prolonged a situation fatal to the nation's most elementary interests.

Note the verdict in this connection of two competent American economists (Professors Bass and Moulton, of the University of Chicago), who in their book *America and the Balance Sheet of Europe* (p. 335), wrote:

"What hope is there for the world so long as the leading Premiers of Allied countries admit that Germany can pay only with goods which none of the Allied nations are willing to receive, and give support to their Parliaments in framing tariff measures designed to prevent German exports, at the same time insist that recalcitrant Germany must meet the

reparation obligations to the last farthing and the last sou? What hope is there for the world so long as most of the leading students of international finance and economics, who recognise the fundamental illusion in reparations and Allied debts, will frankly discuss the subject only in undertones and in inner offices? What hope is there for the world when statesmen and financiers alike, while lacking the courage to tell the truth about reparations and inter-Allied debts, insist that nothing can be done as a practical matter, 'however desirable it might be from an economic point of view,' because the people will not be satisfied to give up the supposed advantages of reparations and debt payments? If ever there was a time for leadership in a campaign of enlightenment on the fundamentals of international economics, it is now. If ever there was a time when the truth is needed to set men free, it is now. If ever there was a time when evasion and concealment were political virtues, it is *not* now."

Compare this situation in Britain and Europe twelve or thirteen years ago to the present situation—or what was the position until very recently—in America over debts. The public in America to-day sees no connection whatever between the tariff and the payment of debt; it still fails completely to understand that if the Debts are to be paid by Europe, America must somehow manage to increase her imports. To-day in America, nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine out of ten thousand ordinary business men would deny emphatically that the amount of America's imports, or America's tariffs, has anything whatever to do with Europe's capacity to pay the Debts. The American is, of course, vaguely aware that all Britain's remaining gold would only pay a fraction of what she owes. Yet he insists that she may pay "in money"—the only money she possesses outside of gold being British money, which has no value in America, and can only be used for the purchase of British goods—which the tariff shuts out. He does not relate the one fact to the other.

The American fails as completely to see that the transfer problem is the crux of the matter, as we failed to see it when we rampaged fourteen thousand million sterling. All mention of the transfer problem has been carefully excluded from the popular newspaper rampage about Debts. To-day, after twenty years of the dis-

cussion of the Reparations, the Debts remain, for the great American public, a simple problem of British morality and honour. The Hearst Press still occasionally harps on the one refrain: "Is it or is it not true that the money was loaned to Britain, and that she promised to repay it? Honest people pay their debts and fulfil their obligations." And that's all.

What is the motive which prompts popular and powerful organs on both sides of the Atlantic thus to hide and distort and confuse the fact which the public interest demands should be fully and clearly understood? What motive actuates the American politician, when in his public speech he demands, and when in his vote in Congress he causes his country to demand, the integral payment of Europe's debts, knowing all the time that it would be wiser to counsel the cancellation of those debts? Why those implications that they can easily be paid? Why the attendant implication that if they are not paid it is due to the ill-will and bad faith of Great Britain? Why all this, knowing the illimitable dangers of the ill-will contained in the view which he fosters?

It is certainly not a perverse desire to deceive the public for the sheer pleasure of deceiving it.

It is explained by certain conditions which attach to the competition for popular votes on the part of the politician and for circulation on the part of the newspaper.

Plainly it is not a pleasant thing for a creditor to be told that his debtor cannot pay. It is not likely to be one of those thoughts whose father is a wish. The evidence has to be pretty clear before we will believe it. If, while considering the point, there comes along a second informant who declares that the first is all wrong, that the debtor can very well pay; that he is hiding his wealth, that if we are all sufficiently "firm" he will pay up—why, we have very ancient biblical authority for the belief that the prophet of smooth things will be the more popular of the two. If he is a politician we will give him our vote; if a newspaper owner, our subscription.

It may be very important for us not to be under illusions. But if we are busy and tired, and we don't like these "calamity howlers" anyhow, we will let our wish rather than our thought dictate our vote or our newspaper subscription.

But the general principle which determines the choice here operates in a multitude of other decisions not concerned with payment of debts or indemnities. We don't like having our convictions disturbed, hearing arguments against them. That is why we always take the paper that agrees with us; belong to clubs of people who share our political belief. The heretic hunting and the general history of the religious conflicts tell us how seriously men have regarded the crime of differing from their opinion. If you doubt the force of this factor, note your feelings the next time that you get into an argument with someone touching a long-cherished theory of yours. He happens, we will suppose, to show you that you are completely wrong. He has done you a very great service. He has put you on the track of truth when you were straying among the pitfalls of error. Are you really grateful? Or do you feel like hitting him?

It is precisely, of course, the opinions which we cannot defend rationally about which we are apt to be most passionate and emotional. Especially if we have a fear, which we may only half admit even to ourselves, that a rational examination may destroy an opinion dearly held, do we resent the attempt of anyone who would rob us of it by rational examination. As we cannot repel the attack on it by reason, we are violent-minded and passionate about it, and declare that to question it is base and immoral. If you would win popularity make no appeal to reason: feed hungry emotions and present appetites.

The power of the demagogue, whether political or journalistic, lies in the fact that it is more immediately popular to confirm or applaud an existing folly than to correct it. And the trouble is that you can't afford to wait months, or years it may be, for your rightness to prove itself by the facts, because meantime your rival



has been elected, or run away with your circulation, his supporters having forgotten, it may be, why they really voted that way, or first took his paper.

In practice and in crises the thing which it is most important for the public to learn, or be reminded of, is precisely the thing which it does not want to know, or wants to forget. What the readers of each paper really want is to read the things which confirm their settled prejudices. To give the public what it wants may at certain times of crisis be extremely bad for it. When it happens to have acquired certain prejudices that may create a good deal of havoc in the world, it does the world an ill-service to feed these prejudices, to persuade its victims that they are a virtue. Yet so to deceive it is precisely what the public does want; and to undeceive it something which it will resent. The paper which at crises does not foment the prejudice will lose circulation, profit, solvency, perhaps, as against one that does. There is a Gresham law at work which will at times so operate that the bad drives out the good prejudices, tickles our animosities, or encourages our fundamental moral conservatism. This preference for hearing only those things which confirm what we have come to feel or think would not matter if we lived in an unchanging world in which we were never called upon to readjust old notions to new conditions. But as we happen to be living at a time when the old civilisation has come clattering about our ears, and when we must reconstruct on somewhat new lines then this fact that nearly the whole force of newspaper competition feeds our already strong tendency to obey the old instincts of nationalism and tribal combativeness become a grave social menace.

This Gresham Law, by which the anti-social instinct is selected and strengthened as against the social, would operate in some degree in any case; always has operated, as we may gather from the psalmist's reference to the popularity of prophesying smooth things, and from the Defence of Socrates, who declared bluntly that no man could hold public office in Athens and tell the truth. But the thing is the more dangerous with us because of

the mechanical element in our civilisation. The "mass production" of newspapers, films, wireless, by great Trusts, is rendering "mass opinion" more and more irresistible. We wield instruments of opinion immeasurably more powerful than those of old. Never perhaps in history was there so wide (and disastrous) a gulf between "public opinion" and "private opinion", between what you may hear expressed openly and freely in smoking-rooms, at private dinner-tables, by public men and journalists, and what they say on public platforms and in the Press. History has known the phenomenon before, but never quite to this degree. Rome knew the period when the Augurs winked in the midst of their solemn mummeries, when virtually "everybody who was anybody" talked with his tongue in his cheek during public professions of the official faith. But they at least believed that all this pretence about the Gods was good for slaves and groundlings whom it was meant to deceive. The modern Augur knows that his deception is bad for those whom he deceives; that it makes the statesman's job more difficult, the journalist's more unpleasant, and the accomplishment of any useful end by either so uncertain, that the whole fabric of society may be threatened—as it is now threatened—by the subserviency of those who do know to those who don't.

This is the nemesis of government by bamboozlement or pander. We think to make the millions do our will by feeding their prejudice and passion; and then at the last we find that we must do theirs, and are the slaves of the thing we nourish. We fought before to make the world safe for democracy to find that the democracy which our war produced, violent-minded, blind, clamant for contradictory things, had made human society itself unsafe.

## CHAPTER 'III

### THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

The industrialised and trustified press as we know it in modern conditions represents not the bulwark of freedom, but more commonly a danger to it. The reasons for this. The remedy is not, however, in public control of the kind which is suitable for the control of material things, railways, sewers, etc. For the press should be entirely free to criticise the controllers who would control its criticisms. But if to exchange a trustified Press for a government one is to jump out of the frying pan into the fire what is the remedy? Some suggestions.

GOVERNMENTS, being composed of human beings, have naturally always been of opinion that all criticism of their conduct should—purely in the public interest—be forcibly and ruthlessly repressed.

The real view of governments was expressed with charming frankness by the Press Censor established in the reign of Charles II. This functionary, a certain Rodger L'Estrange, whose official title was "Surveyor of the Press", and was described as a professional explorer of libels and heresies, gave his opinion as to how he would "survey" the Press if he had his way:

"I do declare myself . . . that supposing the Press in order, the people in their right wits, and news or no news to be the question, a Public Mercury shall never have my vote, because I think it makes the multitude too familiar with the actions and counsels of their superiors, too pragmatical and censorious, and gives them not only an itch but a kind of colourable right and licence to be meddling with the Government."

That rulers, dictators, and governments should hold the view that any criticism of their acts is an offence

against public morals is entirely to be expected. What is stranger is that great sections of the public share this desire to suppress criticism of their rulers: the same public who will be certain to suffer from the deficiencies bound to arise in the case of rulers who are both endowed with irresponsible power and exempt from criticism. But this tendency of the public to hate all who diverge from a prevailing view is entirely in keeping with our experience of human nature. Once give people an orthodoxy—religious, social, or political—and even though that orthodoxy be the orthodoxy of corrupt restoration governments, or Nazi dictators, or Holy Inquisitions, the suppression of heresy is popular.

In the case of governments, suppression of all criticism is usually called "maintaining the national unity", or is invoked as party loyalty or discipline. There are plenty of enthusiastic Nazis very ready indeed to denounce to the Gestapo those members of their families guilty of listening to foreign broadcasts, an offence punishable—even though it be the offence merely of listening to the news of neutral states—with long terms of imprisonment and even death. This is all part of that strong, innate, herd hatred of the heretic which demagogues know so well how to use.

Of late the case for governmental control of the Press is commonly put on more "scientific" grounds. The control of the Press is demanded as part of the modern tendency of all economic activities towards control—though, in the case of the Press, to describe as "modern" the return to conditions of two or three centuries since is characteristic and suggestive.

Professor Carr—of the Ministry of Information in the early part of the war—writes:

"The prejudice which the word propaganda still excites in many minds to-day is closely parallel to the prejudice against state control of industry and trade. Opinion, like trade and industry, should according to the old liberal conception be allowed to flow in its own natural channels without artificial regulation. This conception has broken down on the bare fact that in modern conditions opinion, like trade, is not and cannot be exempt from artificial controls. The issue is no

longer whether men shall be politically free to express their opinions, but whether freedom of opinion has, for large masses of people, any meaning but subjection to the influence of innumerable forms of propaganda directed by vested interests of one kind or another. Some control by the state of this power over opinion has become necessary if the community is to survive. In the totalitarian countries, radio, press and film are state industries absolutely controlled by governments. In democratic countries, conditions vary, but are everywhere tending in the direction of centralised control."

And he adds the significant remark:

"In the event of war, freedom of opinion would be subject to the same measures of constraint as other forms of personal freedom."

This present writer some twenty years since tried to utter a warning against that very confusion—the confusion between control of acts or things and control of knowledge or ideas. While the form and degree of ownership or control which in a socialised order of society the community should exercise over its streets, sewers, roads, bridges, railways, gas, electricity, mines, land or capital, are the common-places of the discussion of an improved social order. But the considerations which apply properly to that discussion do not apply for the most part to the problem of the Press in a dense and industrialised society. The community's main concern with the newspaper is not with its economic function in a direct sense, its importance as a form of property or as a producer of "wealth"—that is altogether secondary. The importance of this problem lies in the fact that the newspapers are still the main means by which the community informs itself of the facts which determine its collective decisions, social or political. The papers are the witnesses upon whose evidence, mainly, the daily judgments of civilised mankind to-day are based. To a society whose purview has come to embrace the whole world—a society which has so developed that the hasty decisions of busy and preoccupied folk, reading "catch headlines" in underground trains, offices, and tea-shops, are laws of war and peace in Delhi, Dublin, and Berlin—

to such a society the Press is at times, and generally in times of crisis, its eyes and its ears, if not indeed its pulpit and its forum.

The present writer pointed out:

"The problem of this form of property is differentiated from other forms by one aspect of its recent history. In the case of such things as roads, bridges, water, telegraphs, obvious social need has declared that they shall pass more and more into the possession of the community; the direction has been from private towards public control. In the case of the Press, the dissemination of the printed word, social need has imposed the contrary tendency: from public control—the dictation of the State—towards private freedom."

He proceeded immediately, however, to indicate the problem which a purely private Press had created:

"Our grandfathers fought for the liberation of the Press from State control as an obvious part of the battle for freedom. It is one of the disillusionments of a purely political democracy that the 'free Press'—the unfettered and abundant production of cheap newspapers to which our grandfathers looked as the means of popular freedom and enlightenment—has become one of the worst obstacles to the development of a capacity for real self-government, perhaps the worst of all the menaces to modern democracy. The institution which the older order most feared as the instrument of revolution has, in fact, become the main instrument by which any real movement towards a new social order is resisted."

But while recognising this problem, he went on to point out that it could not be solved along the lines that were being adopted in the case of ordinary economic activity, and wrote:

"'Nationalisation' as a principle, even when qualified by the self-government of Guild Socialism, cannot be applied to the Press as one might apply it to mines or railways. And it cannot be so applied for a reason that gets at once to the heart of the problem.

"That reason is the nature of the human mind; its extreme fallibility, its indispensable need—if it is to preserve any adequate capacity for sound judgment—of hostile criticism, and contradictory discussion; and the relation which the function of the Press bears to those things. If a people are to

be in a position to judge the conduct of their Government, to decide whether it is doing well or ill, to decide the merits of public policy at all; if, indeed, they are to preserve the capacity for sound judgment, they must have the facts put before them not only as the Government would have them put, but also as those who disagree with the Government may desire to put them."

"In other words", he went on, "the problem of the Press, its place in society, its control, is directly related to the very fundamental problem of freedom of discussion as the indispensable condition of truth; to the fact that all governments—and all peoples—need criticism; that without the correcting influence of unpopular opinions—that is to say, new and unusual opinions which governments and peoples alike always wish to suppress—popular opinion would steadily deteriorate in worth and the capacity for self-government decline."

He insisted that the present industrialised Press does not ensure the condition just named; it progressively undermines it. "But the alternative of returning to the Governmental control of the Press in any of the forms which we had in the past would be to exchange a bad situation for a worse."

Though the dangers resulting from government control are not fundamentally the most serious, they are none the less grave, and need to be watched.

Even in the last war in Britain we came to the suppression of newspapers and the prosecution of men like Bertrand Russell, not for revealing information which could be of any possible use to the enemy, but for the expression of opinion "likely to discourage recruiting". The Sermon on the Mount would discourage recruiting, and a Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State announced, logically enough, that if used for such a purpose that document would be liable to seizure. We had the foreign circulation of quite a number of papers—including that of the *Nation*—prohibited. Authors like Mr. C. Lowes Dickinson were put on a similar index. (The wonders of the military mind in these matters are quite incomprehensible.) We had house-to-house

searches for incriminating documents. In short, there was nothing for which we had held up Imperialist Prussia and Czarist Russia to scorn during generations that could not be done under the law of Britain. And America was worse.

Under the provisions of the amendment to the American Espionage Act of 1918 a fine of ten thousand dollars or twenty years' imprisonment, or both, faced anyone who, while the United States was at war, should "wilfully utter, print, write, or publish any disloyal, profane, scurrilous or abusive language about the form of government of the United States, or the Constitution . . . or the military and naval forces . . . or the flag of the United States . . . or the flag . . . or the uniform . . . into contempt, scorn, contumely or disrepute . . . or suggest the doing of any of the acts or things . . . enumerated." A note on this made at the time runs as follows:

"One cannot follow the amazing account of war-time prosecutions and deportations and legislative expulsions without realising how precarious is the hold which the supposedly fundamental national ideal of freedom has secured in American courts and legislatures. If there had been any real feeling for freedom as a principle, Debs would not have been convicted for a speech generally opposing the war, and praising Rose Pastor Stokes who had been convicted of opposing the draft for a similar speech. (Her conviction was later reversed.) The 'Masses' would not have been excluded from the mails because of cartoons opposing the war and calling Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman 'friends of American freedom'. Mere abusive and intemperate language would have gone unpunished, except by the more effectual censure of public opinion. The son of former Chief Justice Doe, of New Hampshire, would not have been convicted for writing, in a letter, that the President was wrong when he said Germany had promised to end the submarine warfare against neutrals, since the Sussex note contained no such promise. A film producer would not have been sentenced for ten years, and forced into bankruptcy, for exhibiting 'The Spirit of '76', a depiction of scenes from the American revolution which the Judge thought tended to make Americans slack in their loyalty to an ally. Blodgett would not have been sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment for urging the defeat of a Congressman who voted for conscription, and for circulating an argument against the constitutionality of the Draft Act."



But, gross and often stupid as they were, one may doubt whether they represented the worst feature of the return to the governmental control of opinion. They were at least visible, and could be challenged, and the courts were obliged to execute the law publicly. The nation saw in some measure what it was doing and permitting. But the use of governmental propaganda, which has become a feature of government in every belligerent State, is much less overt and much more dangerous.

We shall miss the essential character of the evil, however, if we assume that the fault is purely a governmental one. The worst censorship imposed during the last War—imposed, indeed, in certain matters normally during peace-time—was not that imposed by the governments, but that imposed, first, by certain interests, and also, quite as dangerously, by the public itself. If practically the whole Press of Western Europe and America normally and systematically falsified the news from Russia (in the fashion in which Mr. Lippmann had shown to be the case with one of the greatest of American papers); if it never told a really straight story; if the same sort of distortion about strikes and the Labour Movement was indulged in, that was certainly not due mainly to the exercise of governmental censorship. It was and is due in part to the influence of mental censorship, in part to the influence of certain interests which daily newspapers, as now produced, are bound to respect. But by far the greater influence is that exercised by the readers themselves, "public opinion". It is true that that opinion is created largely by the Press, but it is created by the way in which the Press plays upon and exploits certain tendencies and instincts.

The real danger of any resort to the control of publication by the community is, again, that the natural man hates freedom of discussion—the freedom, that is, of others to utter opinions with which he does not agree, which disturb his convictions. Free discussion, the listening to opinions that seem to us wrong, mischievous, dangerous, and immoral, is an extremely unpleasant and difficult social discipline, to which, however, we must

submit if we are ever to maintain a general judgment capable of managing our complex society at all. And the danger of the principle of public control is that it gives an outlet for the instinct which exists in all of us to coerce and browbeat those so offensive as to disagree with us. To-day it may be asserted by a patriotic majority against pro-Germans or Bolsheviks. But tomorrow the principle will be invoked by Socialists against the *bourgeoisie*, and the next day by one kind of Socialist against another—and always on the ground of course, of State necessity. But the real reason of the action will be the age-long hatred of heresy, of opinions which do not happen to be ours.

I have put the ultimate case against the Press as we know it in the twentieth century thus:

“In a civilisation increasingly complex and difficult to manage, demanding not only a rising level of intelligence but of character—the capacity to discipline certain instincts which, undisciplined, become anti-social and destructive—newspapers are compelled for the profits which are the condition of their existence, increasingly to appeal to the most easily aroused interests of readers; to pander to the instincts and emotions that can be most rapidly excited, to the ‘first’ instead of the ‘second’ thought, irrespective of the social outcome of the tendency or temper thus created. Since the most rapidly aroused emotion is often the most anti-social, and the first thought, as opposed to the second a prejudice, this competitive process sets up a progressive debasement of the public mind and judgment; of that capacity to decide wisely and truly which is, in the last resort, the thing upon which the well-working of society must depend.”

Other dangers of the modern Press are subsidiary to that outstanding one. The Press is often the servant of special political and financial interests, of organised capital, of advertisers. But it can only serve those interests by influencing the public mind in a certain way and by means of a certain general method. If we are to deal with proposals for meeting the dangers of such a situation we must understand something of the mechanism of that method.

One, when discussing with the editor of a popular

daily the absurdity and mischief of the line he was taking, he said cynically enough something like this:

"It's bunk, but it's good selling stuff, and if I don't use it, X. across the street will, and run off with my circulation. I intend to run off with his before he can do it. When this is seen for the nonsense it is I shall be ready with another stunt which will cause the public to forget this one."

In economics there is a law known as the Gresham Law, where good and bad coin circulate together; the bad drives out the good because people keep the good and pass on the bad. There is a Gresham Law of public opinion.

For a large economic interest to become linked to the maintenance and encouragement of some common human weakness is nothing new in our society. The position of the liquor traffic at certain times will occur to one as a typical case. There has grown up in recent years this other great economic interest (by its very nature in a position to exercise enormous influence in a much more direct fashion than the liquor trades could), which is pushed, as an indispensable condition of sure and rapid profit-making, to maintain and develop certain passions and weaknesses socially much more destructive than the taste for strong drink. At no time did we ever see alcohol take such possession of whole nations and groups of nations for years together that Governments and people alike indulged in orgies of self-destruction and drank themselves back to barbarism. But the moral and intellectual drunkenness that in recent years had prompted one nation after another to adopt policies which each had condemned as madness and wickedness when followed by others, threatens the very foundation of our civilisation. (Testimony to the fact is now so common that repetition of it has become hackneyed and wearisome.) This failure of public sanity, of sound social judgment, is a disorder of public opinion not peculiar to Germany. The evil results have come to the surface of late mainly in the international field; but the evil goes a great deal deeper than a mere error or fallacy in one department of politics, and it includes a good deal more

than Nationalism or Jingoism. We have seen that the public mind of whole nations can become, on all sorts of subjects, unbalanced; may lose the capacity for that collective good sense without which we certainly cannot live together in material security or moral satisfaction.

It is not suggested that the Press is the cause of this lack of balance in public judgment (for the cause must include deeply rooted, anti-social instincts of human nature), but that a certain section of the Press is pushed, as a first condition of its existence, to intensify the human weaknesses which lie at the root of most public folly, to render them more unmanageable, to become the exploiter and developer of immensely dangerous disruptive forces. This does not, of course, apply to the Press as a whole—"the Press" must include an infinite variety of publications. But it does apply generally to that section which is organised into great industrial combinations involving capital running into millions, and which must consequently, in order to pay dividends, maintain enormous circulations at all cost, and so take the shortest possible cut to exciting the interest of all and sundry—factory girls, schoolboys, tea-shop waitresses—in any public question which may happen to come up.

*It is not a question of the shortcomings or folly of a particular owner, a Northcliffe or a Rothermere. If there has been no Lord Northcliffe in the generation produced by the Education Acts of the seventies and eighties, the social problem presented by the industry of which he was so eminent a captain would have been no less acute. The problem is hardly less great in America and in France, although the circumstances of newspaper production there differ in important details from the circumstances of the British industry. It is not a matter of personalities, or particular people, or groups, but of fundamental human forces acted upon in a certain way. Let us see in what way.*

Note first a few points which may help in understanding the nature of that "public insanity" just touched upon. Even during the last war most people other than the Germans were amazed at the complacency with which a whole nation acquiesced without protest in

brutalities which we were sure no civilised people outside Germany would have sanctioned. The non-German was amazed, that is to say, if he conveniently forgot that Anglo-Saxon communities in Texas and Alabama and other Southern States had for years, in times of profound peace, acquiesced in the roasting alive and obscene torture of helpless and often quite innocent men (and women), or was oblivious to French conduct not only during the Terror, but in the suppression of the Commune in the lifetime of men now living. In their turn, the Virginian and the Frenchman, moved by the chivalry which is the tradition of both, simply could not understand the British Cabinet's implied defence of Black-and-Tan conduct in Ireland. They were shocked as deeply and genuinely as were subscribers to the fund for the Hero of Amritsar at the notion that a British Government should "shake hands with murder" by giving a *quasi* recognition to the "assassins of Moscow". During the Dreyfus case most British and Americans were forced to conclude in all seriousness that "France had gone mad", as later we declared Germany to have gone mad. We have talked since of the "insane" hatreds of the Irish or the Bolsheviks or the Balkan peoples. An Englishman who reads the story of lynchings in the Southern States, with their thousands of excursionists coming by train to see a negro's tongue torn out before he is burned alive, can only conclude that these people are mad or unspeakable ghouls.

Now we know, as a matter of fact, that these people—whether French, American, English, or German—are not ghouls; they are not mad; they are not cruel; they are not stupid. In 90 per cent. of the relations of life they are sensible, kindly people. But we also know that there is a point, one phase in their relations with their kind, at which they can be cruel or stupid or mean beyond all adequate description, and that, unhappily, the 90 per cent. of wisdom does not prevent the 10 per cent. of madness from carrying the day in the case of public policies which may cause immeasurable destruction and misery.

Here lies the heart of the difficulty. At junctures like those just described, a popular paper, far from finding profit in doing what the public interest demands, must, on pain of extinction by vigilant rivals, do the exact reverse. Far, that is, from restraining passion by invoking intelligently interpreted experience through a picture of the whole truth, it must, in pursuit of elementary interest, still further distort truth: it must make a part obscure the whole, must hide the facts which might restore the mental balance.

An important distinction should be noted. There are papers—*Manchester Guardians* among dailies, and in all countries a number of "high-brow" reviews—that do in some measure deal with the whole truth. And fortunately the number of this better type steadily increases. The growing success of the more impartial and responsible daily paper as against the "yellow" type, has been one of the encouraging signs of recent years. But it is still true that great newspaper concerns depend mainly for their prosperity upon the exploitation of triviality, sometimes hysteria and prejudice. Obviously when publications whose circulations run into millions deal with politics or public questions at all, they must do so in a form which will appeal most readily to the tens of millions, to the tea-shop waitress or the school-girl typist. That is to say, it must touch some feeling easily aroused; must not puzzle them by upsetting conceptions that have become familiar; and must present so simple a case that it will hold attention in competition with the rattle of Tube and factory, or the fatigue of the day's end. And though the waitress or typist may be as capable, inherently and potentially, of sound political judgment as the country parson and the retired colonel who were such large constituents of public opinion a generation ago, modern conditions, both as they affect the readers and the newspaper industry itself, not only give native common sense and individual judgment less chance as against mass suggestion than did conditions a generation or two ago, but the unwisdom of the ~~million~~ million is politically much more serious and dangerous now than it was then.

Note first a certain historical development. In the eighteenth century two or three pamphleteers, political and intellectual leaders, could and often did profoundly affect events by sheer argument. A few pounds spent with a printer in a back street enabled them to reach the effective political public. Public opinion and private opinion were thus very close to one another. In order to reach the modern public the publicist must work through the mechanism of daily newspapers in which millions of pounds of capital, which he must not jeopardise, have been invested. What he writes must preferably confirm existing feeling. The result is that the informed private opinion of those who have access to the facts other than through the popular Press is usually on vital matters the exact contrary of the public opinion to which again and again Governments are compelled to bow against their own better judgment.

We are sometimes told that on these issues the industrialised newspaper concerns are simply misjudging public opinion, or that its owners have some interest other than that of circulation in the line which they take. But we may assume pretty safely, in view of their commercial history, that these people know their business. The fact is that those who belong to the "inside" world of Westminster and Whitehall, and the "City", and the directorate of political parties do not realise the unimportance of that world from the point of view of the modern popular newspaper. Indeed, its *numercial* unimportance was the great discovery of Alfred Harmsworth. He said on one occasion: "When I came into the newspaper business all London dailies were produced with an eye to about a quarter of a million people. I come to produce papers for the remaining forty million." And with that object very clearly in view he produced first the *Daily Mail* and later papers like the *Daily Mirror*. ("Having", said the late Lord Salisbury, "invented a daily for those who cannot *think*, Mr. Harmsworth has now invented one for those who cannot *read*.") And just because those who belong to the quarter of a million do not fully realise their numerical unimportance, they are apt to assume that the changes of opinion or policy

familiar to them are familiar to the forty million. It is a profound mistake. Any change involving considerable readjustment of familiar views percolates very slowly to the forty million.

And as people don't like changing their ideas, to flatter prejudice is always consoling and heresy hunting always a popular sport. It is one of the reasons why the nations have failed to adapt their political ideas to a world which physical science is so rapidly and so profoundly changing.

Whatever the evils of the existing industrialised Press, the preceding pages will suffice to show that a State Press monopoly would be a still greater evil. That would be a short-cut return to a position out of which we have had to struggle as the first condition of freedom; it would recreate an instrument of intellectual tyranny as evil as the Inquisition, and would inevitably undermine both the efficiency of the Government by depriving it of real criticism, and the capacity for self-rule on the part of the mass by the silencing of minority opinion, and so of real discussion and vital intellectual life.

In what direction, then, may we look for solution?

Even the Socialist should be extremely sceptical of the idea that an improvement upon the present condition, or an alternative to the present system, need be or ought to be a single, exclusive alternative. Even in a Utopia a privately owned Press might well not only be tolerated but encouraged. It is advisable, parenthetically, to recall why a Press under private ownership (the kind of Press of which, as we have seen, the Trust newspapers tend to deprive us) should be a feature of any vigorous society. By a "Press" here is meant the printed word generally—the book, the pamphlet, the periodical, the weekly review, the leaflet, handbill, poster, circular. If the right of the individual to use those things as the instrument of individual thought is not preserved we must abandon the principle of freedom of discussion altogether and proscribe political or social heresies. We fall back upon the *Index expurgatorius*.

We fall back upon it, of course, both in England and



America during the last war, and life-long Liberals had no difficulty in deciding that the Sermon on the Mount might very well become seditious political heresy, meet for suppression under the Defence of the Realm Act. In America (and in England, too, in some measure) the same powers have been used in the suppression of Communistic propaganda; in America the repression, particularly in dealing with the I.W.W., has been ferocious. Nor does Communism make any pretence: there can be no liberty of criticism.

The whole story of *bourgeois* society during the war and of the Communistic revolution since, in this matter of free discussion, shows once more clearly enough what has been so abundantly displayed throughout all history: that the natural man loathes freedom of discussion; it unsettles his convictions, creates doubts where before there were none, compels difficult intellectual effort, and puts him in the absurd position of pretending to like being told that he is wrong, that his opinions are absurd, and that consequently he is a fool. No man likes being told this. Yet freedom of discussion means no less.

It is because we have not faced intellectual freedom as an *extremely unpleasant and unnatural thing*, but profess to love it for itself, that it has so far been neither understood nor applied. It is only if we recognise freedom of discussion for what it is—an extremely unpleasant discipline that offends some of our deepest instincts, but which is indispensable for the formation of an adequate social intelligence—only on that condition can we hope to preserve under “planned” societies the reality of intellectual freedom. On such a basis we may hope to make of the “liberty to know, to utter and to argue freely according to conscience”, which, in Milton’s phrase, is “above all liberties”, something of use and value that can be applied in actual political working.

For we know, some of us to our cost, that the principle of “complete freedom of speech and Press” is too vague to be capable of practical application. Papers cannot be free to libel individuals, to be obscene, to

publish military secrets, any more than orators could be free to hold up the traffic at the Bank at mid-day by their eloquence. So we have to qualify it. And in those qualifications we find an excuse for getting rid of the freedoms that we detest. Instead of proclaiming, in the fashion of the American Constitution, high and mighty principles, and then paying not the slightest attention to them, because in their entirety they cannot be applied, the architects of the new order will be better employed devising the precise methods by which the maximum of free discussion can be gained with due regard to the need of keeping society's traffic unimpeded.



We come to the possibilities of a State Press, organs run not by the Government, but by "public concerns" of the nature of the B.B.C., not as a monopoly or an exclusive substitute for privately owned papers but as a supplement thereto.

Just as, for the reasons we have dealt with, the ideal solution cannot reject a free, privately owned Press, for the production of books, pamphlets, circulars, periodicals, placards, and so forth, although private capital in newspapers has attendant upon it many of the evils analysed in the preceding pages, so neither can we reject a "State Press" as part of the solution, although a State *monopoly* in publication would inevitably be the beginning and foundation of a new tyranny more deadly than any theological tyranny of the past. If, for the preservation of sound judgment by the majority, we need to give the minority means for stating its case, that object also demands that the majority, the Government, shall have the same facility. A competently managed "Official Journal" is by no means to be rejected as one of the elements of sound public judgment. The management of the State Press should not be placed under a Government Department responsible to members of the Government, but entrusted to a body occupying much the same position that is now held by a court of law—independent, that is, of the Government; telling the truth as it sees it, guided by principles which are recognised as the

foundations of the Guild or profession from which the members of the journalistic "judiciary" would be drawn.

The problem of giving to the profession of journalism the status that we now give to law and medicine has been stated by Mr. Walter Lippmann as follows :—

"The taking of testimony in a trial is hedged about with a thousand precautions derived from long experience of the fallibility of the witness and the prejudices of the jury. We call this, and rightly, a fundamental phase of human liberty. But in public affairs the stake is infinitely greater. It involves the lives of millions, and the fortune of everybody. The jury is the whole community, not even the qualified voters alone. The jury is everybody who creates public sentiment—chattering gossips, unscrupulous liars, congenital liars, feeble-minded people, prostitute minds, corrupting agents. To this jury any testimony is submitted, in any form, by any anonymous persons, with no test of reliability, no test of credibility, and no penalty for perjury. If I lie in a lawsuit involving the fate of my neighbour's cow, I can go to jail. But if I lie to a million readers in a matter involving war and peace, I can lie my head off, and if I choose the right series of lies, be entirely irresponsible. Nobody will punish me if I lie about Japan, for example. I can announce that every Japanese valet is a reservist, and every Japanese art store a mobilisation centre. I am immune. And if there should be hostilities with Japan, the more I lied the more popular I should be. If I asserted that the Japanese secretly drank the blood of children, that Japanese women were unchaste, that the Japanese were really not a branch of the human race after all, I guarantee that most of the newspapers would print it eagerly, and that I could get a hearing in churches all over the country. And all this for the simple reason that the public, when it is dependent on testimony and protected by no rules of evidence, can act only on the excitement of its pugnacities and its hopes.

"The mechanism of the news-supply has developed without plan, and there is no one point in it at which one can fix the responsibility for truth. The fact is that the subdivision of labour is now accompanied by the subdivision of the news-organisation. At one end of it is the eye-witness, at the other the reader. Between the two is a vast, expensive transmitting and editing apparatus. This machine works marvellously well at times, particularly in the rapidity with which it can report the score of a game or a transatlantic flight, or the death of a monarch, or the result of an election. But where the issue is complex, as for example in the matter of the success of a policy, or the social conditions among a

foreign people,—that is to say, where the real answer is neither yes nor no, but subtle and a matter of balanced evidence—the subdivision of the labour involved in the report causes no end of derangement, misunderstanding, and even misrepresentation.”<sup>1</sup>

The suggestion is, indeed, his that until journalism can evolve a professional standard at least as high as that of law and medicine, the Press can only be regarded as a social excrescence.

Journalism, then, must become a profession demanding a certain minimum of intellectual equipment, which must include some knowledge of “what is evidence”. Mr. Lippmann, dealing with this side of the subject, points out that

“with this increase in prestige must go a professional training in journalism in which the ideal of objective testimony is cardinal. The cynicism of the trade needs to be abandoned, for the true patterns of the journalistic appearance are not the slick persons who scoop the news, but the patient and fearless men of science who have laboured to see what the world really is. . . . Just because news is complex and slippery, good reporting required the exercise of the highest of the scientific virtues. They are the habits of ascribing no more credibility to a statement than it warrants, a nice sense of the probabilities, and a keen understanding of the quantitative importance of particular facts. You can judge the general reliability of any observer most easily by the estimate he puts upon the reliability of his own report. If you have no facts of your own with which to check him, the best rough measurement is to wait and see whether he is aware of any limitations in himself: whether he knows that he saw only part of the event that he describes and whether he has any background of knowledge against which he can set what he thinks he has seen.

“This kind of sophistication is, of course, necessary for the merest pretence to any education. But for different professions it needs to be specialised in particular ways. A sound legal training is pervaded by it, but the scepticism is pointed to the type of case with which the lawyer deals. The reporter’s work is not carried on under the same conditions, and therefore requires a different specialisation. How he is to acquire it is, of course, a pedagogical problem requiring an inductive study of the types of witness and the sources of information with whom the reporter is in contact.

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<sup>1</sup> From an article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, November 1919.

"Some time in the future, when men have thoroughly grasped the role of public opinion in society, scholars will not hesitate to write treatises on evidence for the use of news-gathering services. No such treatise exists to-day, because political science has suffered from that curious prejudice of the scholar which consists in regarding an irrational phenomenon as not quite worthy of serious study." <sup>1</sup>

But there must also be a code. We have indeed something more than the beginnings already of a professional code to which reputable journalists feel under an obligation of honour to subscribe. That code must be developed.

Whatever there is of good in the "Guild idea", as we see it operating in the professions of law and medicine, should be applied to the profession of journalism. Having secured that, a planned society might safely embark upon the experiment of a State Press (which should not, however, be a monopoly), under the control not of the Government, but of a body occupying very much the relationship that the judiciary now occupies to the Executive—a collateral authority, pledged to certain principles and standards.

Irrespective of these forecasts of a problematical future it is certain that on balance there has been immense improvement in the last twenty years in the Press. More and more is public judgment showing preference for the informative and impartial type of paper—a preference which in part accounts for the success of "news-letters". To the evils of triviality, one-sidedness, emotionalism, and hysteria there are increasing correctives. With all its limitations, the B.B.C. on its educational side is one; and among others it is certain that the Penguin Book occupies no unimportant place.

<sup>1</sup> From the *Atlantic Monthly*, December 1919.

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D N Pritt, K C M P	<i>Light on Moscow</i>	S 44
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Harold Nicolson	<i>Why Britain is at War</i>	S 47
Walter Theimer	<i>The Penguin Political Dictionary</i>	S 48
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Sir Richard Acland M P	<i>Unser Kampf (Our Struggle)</i>	S 54
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